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"Come, Sally, I know how deadly marriage is. Take your own h
for example — have your parents kept their romance?"
(*See page 184*)

A WOMAN'S WOMAN

BY

NALBRO BARTLEY
Author of "Paradise Auction," "The Bargain True," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

HENRY RALEIGH



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"— blow into town presumably walking the ties and get a job at the factory, act as rough as I like and lay in wait to see if they are employing child labor." *See page 125* 256



A WOMAN'S WOMAN

A WOMAN'S WOMAN

I

It was during her elder daughter Harriet's high-school graduation in 1901 that Densie Plummer determined after nineteen years of unquestioned loyalty to break up her home and start life anew in strange and contrasting channels.

As she looked at her family beside her and thought of the old friends sitting just behind, and at Harriet, president of her class, she wondered if she betrayed her treason. Her flushed cheeks were probably attributed to pride — Harriet winning the gold medal for first honors. However she was not thinking about Harriet any more than Harriet was included in the general retrospection that seemed to demand all of Densie's attention.

She knew that if she remained in the Little House on the Hill — so she and John Plummer had named it when they returned from their wedding journey — she would be subjected to the painful and never-ending process of "educating mother"; that Sally and Harriet and Kenneth, her one son, and John, her husband, would relentlessly proceed to assail her old-fashioned ideas and standards, though offering her no substitute in return. She therefore determined to seek her own substitute.

She applauded for some inane recitation and assumed a conventional smile of motherly pride as Harriet began to read her essay. But she could not have repeated a single word of it, though her dark blue eyes — the sort

that turn purple in novels — kept staring at seventeen-year-old Harriet Plummer, tall and thin, a clever sallow-faced girl with dark bright eyes and black hair combed into a huge knot regardless of fashion.

Densie was promising herself that as soon as she was alone in her home — to-morrow afternoon very likely — she would indulge in a retrospection of her life, in which she would review all that had happened, good or bad, as a retiring general does his army. She wanted to be sure of herself before she made this drastic change. If after the retrospection was fully accomplished she was still of the same mind she would become a flat dweller.

Sally, sitting at her right hand, began to fidget with her pink feather fan. Sally was fifteen and inclined to pretties even as Harriet was to books. But Densie did not turn in reproval; she stared ahead wondering why this strange yet fascinating resolution had come to her, and what would be its results.

Sally dropped her fan and Dean Laddbarry, Sally's cavalier from kindergarten days, bent to pick it up. Densie did not notice, though at that moment she was thinking about Sally and Dean, and that Sally was too handsome to be true. As some of the old friends had said when she was a baby, " She will either break hearts or have her own broken, since she is destined for romance."

At fifteen Sally was beginning to fulfill the prophecy — she had been born " cuddled," as she said; made for love and kisses and endless admiration, which she grew to accept as Harriet did her pieces of bread and butter or Kenneth his occasional pats on the shoulder. Her chestnut-red hair curled irresistibly and was combed a different way every day in the week, adorned with a different colored bow. Harriet never bothered about her hair — it was worn in a straight braid with a black bow carelessly

hitched on at the end until she turned it up into a bun and said she wished she were a boy — short hair was so jolly much easier!

At fifteen Sally painted menu cards and dabbled with water colors, neglecting to dust or sew her seam as her mother had been taught to do. She also danced and demanded an evening coat and French perfumes and said she would like to stop school and take painting lessons; anyway, she meant to marry very young and have everything she wanted, so what was the use of mummy's making her learn how to bake things or render down suet! Sally had the best room in the house; she naturally gravitated to it and stayed there, regardless of company's arrival. She had more possessions than Harriet and Kenneth put together — people always gave Sally things, she did not even have to ask for them. But the things Harriet had, she earned. With her earnings she bought queer books, so her mother thought, and went to lectures instead of matinées with Sally.

Sitting beside Sally in a state of modified rapture Dean Laddbarry glanced sideways to watch Sally's adorable tilted nose and curved scarlet mouth, and remarked to himself that the ruffles on Sally's dress were crisper and more ruffly than anyone else's in the room. To Dean, Sally was nothing less than an angel, a divine being who occasionally bestowed a smile on him and kept him trotting the rest of the time to do her bidding.

Dean's relatives, who lived near the Little House, had long ago said Sally was all that saved Dean's running off to sea. Sally wanted him about, and so, braving the title of mollycoddle, he stayed. He was a nondescript freckled-faced lad of seventeen, with honest gray eyes and a long thin face — just a good-looking thing, as Sally said. As he timidly put out the tip of his little finger to see if it

could touch Sally's she gave it a sharp rap with her fan. Dean had given her the fan as a valentine.

Next to Dean sat the only one really intent on Harriet's essay on Hannibal — Kenneth, the youngest, boasting six years, with gentle brown eyes and a thatch of flaxen hair that made him a sissy, so Sally declared when she wished to tease. His flaring red tie and white collar betokened approaching manhood, he flattered himself, and he was trying to live up to their requirements and not become sleepy or fidgety even though it was way past bedtime — past ten o'clock, he hopefully imagined.

Even Kenneth was outgrowing Densie's limitations; he no longer wished to be caressed if he had a bad bump or someone hurt his feelings; he despised the titles "our baby" and "my little one," and had told his mother he wanted to go to a boys' camp the next summer.

On Densie's other side was her husband. He did not look his thirty-nine years; on the contrary he had a boyish face contrasting with Densie's settled countenance, though she was two years his junior. He was a well-built, kindly featured man, a tinge of gray in his chestnut hair, and humorous dark eyes, with a well-modeled mouth by way of contrast. He was dressed according to the fashion of a clean-cut American business man, and as he glanced at Densie his brows drew together in annoyance.

"John's one fault," his Aunt Sally used to say, "is that he shows everything he thinks — he cannot control that face of his, more's the pity."

He was thinking, as he looked at Densie and remembered their nineteenth wedding anniversary was not far off, that Densie actually seemed old! He hated himself for the thought, yet it was emphatic in its constant repetition. She seemed, very properly, the mother of Harriet, Sally and Kenneth, maid of all work in the Little House,

stay-at-home, conventionally religious person who could make frocks — though her last ones had not sufficient style to please Sally — clean house, and entertain the Ladies' Guild of Saint Martha, having sat up half the night to finish her poundcake and sandwiches! Densie belonged to the old school, her husband realized, his brows still knit in annoyance. "An old dear," he added quickly as a sop to conscience; and of course the children's mother. He must always look out for her and never let her suspect his treasonous thoughts. At this identical moment Densie was saying mentally, "I shall justify my stand to-morrow — and then begin again. I will not be called out of date at thirty-seven. I will not have my family ashamed of me and proud only of my cooking!"

John turned away before she should look at him. He had never been able to conceal his thoughts from Densie! But he looked about the big school hall at the other mothers and fathers, and made sharp and unkind contrasts. "America is the land of progress," he told himself as conscience salve, "and the old order of things must change —the younger generation come knocking at the door."

It was picturesque and amusing to recall older times and customs, the regularity and narrowness of the life in which Densie had been raised; he forgot that it likewise applied to himself. The women just ahead of him were smartly gowned, their hair dressed fashionably, a suggestion of perfume, kid-gloved or beringed hands, and other little accessories that make or mar a toilet. They seemed like girls — American mothers were beginning to rebel against age, the conventional sitting-by-the-fire attitude. They were young as long as they could make the world believe them young. Their husbands seemed proud of them, and attentive as John had once been to

Densie. To all outward appearances romance had not deserted them. And if they borrowed a bit of rouge or a false curl to complete the effect, what mattered it?

John knew he contrasted well with the men, that he was almost as youthful looking as the day he married Densie; and that he felt infinitely younger, strangely enough. It seemed incredible that here was a serious-minded seventeen-year-old girl of his graduating!

He applauded as Harriet finished, and then listened to someone sing. He supposed Harriet would stay at home with her mother, as was proper, and — well — marry: most women did. In fact, he had thought very little about it. He took another glance at Densie, and found himself frowning in open disapproval.

She wore an old-style hat — fit for a grandmother, he judged — and a black-silk dress that was homemade and fastened with an enormous cameo brooch. Her face was an unbecoming red — she ought to use powder with discretion — and her white-silk gloves had been mended at the tips while her boots were flat heeled and unbecoming. She really could have been called fifty at a passing glance, even if the dark-blue eyes had an undying girlishness and her brown hair was untouched by gray. Still, Densie would dress her hair in morose fashion, as Sally declared, trying to correct the defect. It was drawn back from her forehead and twisted into a hard knot with ugly hairpins carelessly thrust in and about it. She was stooped because she had worked so hard — so unnecessarily hard, John Plummer thought with a shrug of his shoulders. Why will women insist on being slaves to pots and pans, this everlasting beating of rugs just so often and of never being able to hire a washwoman that is satisfactory? It was all a part of the foolishness of the past. If Densie had only been sensible she would have spared herself half

her pains — but he long ago stopped remonstrating.

"If you want to kill yourself, my dear, I am sorry; but I refuse to perish with you," he had said one memorable spring day, coming home in a new pearl-gray suit and Panama hat, preparatory to attending some business luncheon and finding Densie in forlorn calico, pathetically wiping down ceilings and washing the tops of the tall old-style windows.

She had begun to feel old then, as she paused to look down at him from the top of her stepladder.

"The woman was sick and couldn't come," she had begun in self-defense.

"Let it go! Must it be done to-day?" he had insisted.

"I hate to get behind with my work. Aunt Sally taught me that way." She had been watching his debonair self very closely.

"Have it your own way. I shall not be home until late. Where are those handkerchiefs you made for me — the ones with a monogram? I found I had nothing but a rag when I reached the office." He flourished it before her.

"In the lower right-hand drawer of your chiffonier," she said, standing up to resume her work. "The laundries make rags out of everything; that is why I wash myself when the women don't come."

Without answering he had left her, telling himself that after just so many years of married life women love to become martyrs!

Now, as the exercises neared the end, he felt the same glow of impatience. He had always provided well for his family. Left the heir to the house of Plummer & Plummer, tea, coffee and spices, a substantial firm of integrity and prosperous business, he had managed to carry

on the trade fairly well. Of late the profits were not so large, and living expenses much higher. But Densie knew how to save in the home — it was her world, that house on the hill crowded with old-time furniture. John had not stinted himself for clubs or vacation jaunts; he needed the change, he told Densie, who had always agreed with him.

They were rising to sing America. It seemed to him it took Densie longer to rise than the others; the other women were graceful, they probably danced and played golf, and had breakfast in bed.

Sam Hippler, his Uncle Herbert's confidential clerk, touched him on the arm.

"She's a right smart girl, John," Sam Hippler whispered loudly.

Some people smiled in amusement at the old man. John nodded, and began singing the second stanza. Sam Hippler belonged to Densie's world, too — Sam with his old-style black coat and striped trousers for business and a choker tie fastened by a pearl pin, his gold-rimmed glasses and his withered face, his fussy inefficient methods, though the result was usually all right. He still insisted on having a high writing desk, at which he stood to balance his books or write his letters. Of course, John would always keep Sam Hippler, though a girl and a typewriter would be more to the purpose; he had promised his uncle he would do so, and Densie would make a tremendous row if he broke his word. Densie had Sam Hippler for Sunday-night tea, and made the children, much against their will, be respectful as he stumbled through the long table blessing or told some dull tale of his early days in Lancashire, England.

There were also Maude Hatton and Lucy Parks, the two other relics, now.

But everyone was beginning to crowd about the graduates, and Sally and Dean began to find their way toward the door, while Kenneth snuggled up to Densie's skirts. Kenneth was beginning to be sleepy and his mother would see to it that he reached home. Kenneth never asked his father for anything but money. Neither did he confide in or appeal to him for sympathy. Sally was her father's favorite, partly because she was beautiful and partly because she knew how " to manage daddy." Harriet was too brainy and too sallow, and the boy only a girlish sort of youngster whom his mother was fast spoiling.

Densie put her hand on Kenneth's head. " Yes, sonny, you've been very good. We'll hurry home. Come, John, this child is half-asleep. Oh, Aunt Maude, I'm so much obliged to you for the beautiful pin; Harriet will thank you herself."

Which was a white lie and she wondered if Miss Hatton realized it, for the beautiful pin had been an old-style twisted brooch, which she had given Harriet in lieu of money to buy something new. Maude Hatton had sewed for Densie and for Densie's aunt when the latter was a little girl. She was an eccentric kind-hearted spinster whom everyone considered a trifle mad, living in one room of a forlorn boarding house, sewing by the day for those " who don't want style but strength," she said herself, and with the sole companionship of a canary bird to round out her existence. Densie had Maude Hatton to Sunday tea also; she would have had her more often only the family were too obviously bored. So she sent her baskets of food or pieces of cloth for a waist or skirt and often put a bouquet of flowers and a magazine in her room to greet her in surprise. Miss Hatton understood the situation better than Densie, but out of loyalty she remained silent — except to Lucy Parks, Densie's other old friend, also

belonging to Aunt Sally's day, as the school-teacher who had taught both John and Densie their tables and had read Peter Parley's History of the Animal Kingdom to them on Sunday afternoons.

Miss Parks was pensioned now, rooming near Miss Hatton in similar isolation, and she came once a week to the Plummers', only to be mimicked afterward by Sally and criticized by Harriet. When Miss Parks was scheduled to appear at the Plummer dinner table John always found a downtown engagement to keep him from the pleasure.

"Mother's old seamstress and teacher," Sally had said with the insolence of fifteen years. "Oh, dear, I wonder if we can ever get a new sort of friends and house and start in again — just as if the others never did exist."

Lucy Parks patted Densie on her unfashionable shoulder; Densie still seemed a little girl in her faded eyes. "Your girl Harriet is bound to be brilliant, Densie; your aunt and I said so the first week she was born — bound to be brilliant, but see that she knows how to keep house as well as to write essays on Hannibal. Howdy, John. Well, does it seem strange to have a grown-up daughter?"

After which she gathered her bottle-green umbrella and a beaded reticule, both of which had come out of the ark, according to Sally, and departed in company with Maude Hatton and Sam Hippler.

Neighbors began speaking to the Plummers, and then the crowd dispersed, some to make ready for the dance and refreshments, and some to go home.

"Sally wants to stay for dancing," Densie said as she buttoned Kenneth's coat. "Dean is here with her, and I hate to say no."

"Let her stay. Isn't Harriet going to?"

"Yes; but I don't want them coming home alone."

"I'll stay," John suggested. "You go on with Kenneth and don't worry about us."

Densie nodded. "I'll leave the key in the box of geranium plants; and don't let it be any later than eleven, will you?"

"All right, lady," he said in amusement.

Densie and Kenneth passed ahead, first to find Harriet and congratulate her, and then to warn Sally about not being too giddy. It was on the tip of Densie's gentle tongue to say, "When I was a girl we never had such graduating exercises, with engraved invitations and jeweled class pins, expensive dresses and a string orchestra to play for dancing." But she kept her thoughts to herself as she piloted a rather tumbly, sleepy son in a rumpled sailor suit through the crowd.

Harriet was standing with a group of teachers. She had never mingled with her classmates and had been elected president from standing rather than popularity. She gave her mother a superior smile, her black brows drawing together in slight displeasure. Harriet was not chagrined, as were John and Sally, that Densie was not in fashionable semi-evening dress, but that her mother was so old-fashioned and "uneducated," as Harriet was beginning to call it—"a queer little thing who likes Annie Laurie and has her parlor curtains looped back with huge satin bows and who cries when someone recites Casabianca, and has her few books arranged in veritable tiers on the drawing-room table, with an illustrated edition of Meredith's The Earl's Return topping the pile!"

She was afraid her mother would make some break in speaking to the adored and revered teachers who had interested themselves in Harriet's brain progress.

"You did nicely, dear," Densie began timidly, actually

in awe of this seventeen-year-old girl. "Your father has gone after Sally; she wants to stay for dancing."

Then she nodded at the teachers.

One of them said to her, "We are so proud of Harriet, but we expect to be much prouder of her before very long. We hope that you and Mr. Plummer will not interfere with what she wishes to do. This is the age for women, and Harriet is one of the pioneer vanguard. Have you told your mother about it, Harriet?"

"I did not think she would want to be bothered," Harriet said with reserve.

"Oh, do tell her!" urged another teacher, looking at Densie with quizzical eyes.

"I want to go to the social-service school in New York for five years, and I've — I've been working for a scholarship ——"

"And she has won it!" supplemented the first teacher. "You surely cannot say no, can you, Mrs. Plummer?"

Kenneth tugged at his mother's skirt. Densie felt bewildered.

"I shall talk it over with my husband," she said with old-time reserve, it being the first proper answer coming to her mind.

Harriet smiled again. "I must go, mother! I want to devote my life to educating my own sex."

At seventeen it sounded rather amusing, but Densie concealed her sense of humor with a smile, and after a few more words — most unappreciative of her efforts, Harriet thought — she found her way to where Sally, flushed and giggling, was surrounded by boys, Dean nonchalantly standing guard behind her chair.

"Oh, mummy dear, I haven't dared tell Sis how splendid she was; I can't remember what she did say about Hannibal. I'll wait until daddy makes us come home,

and then I'll have all sorts of nice things made up to say."

She tilted her beautiful willful little face up to Densie for a good-night kiss. Sally was in truth born cuddled; love to her was the same as bread to the working man. She must love someone and be loved in return. She drew Kenneth up to her and hugged him prettily.

"Don't be late, will you, Sally dear? To-morrow is Saturday, and we've lots to do."

Densie admired her daughter in spite of herself.

"I'll see that she's home all right," Dean promised. "Can I get your cab for you?"

"Thank you, but we'll walk; it is only a stone's throw."

Densie unfashionably left the schoolhouse on foot, with Kenneth half-asleep yet bewailing the fact of no ice cream and cake as a reward for listening to Harriet's essay on Hannibal! She caught a glimpse of her husband as she left. He was talking to Harriet and some of the teachers; the teachers were smiling and animated; and Harriet, like a proud dark-woodsy creature, aloof from the others, stood and gazed out the window, seeing only her girlish visions of conquering and reforming the universe. Harriet was like a sexless sprite with the mind of a rusty old savant and the unfolded heart of a girl!

Some children leaving the hall jostled against Densie. A woman said sharply: "Be careful! Don't crowd that old lady!"

Densie gave a choked laugh — Kenneth was too small to notice — but either Sally or Harriet would have seized upon it as a reproach to her old-fashioned self. At thirty-seven — an old lady! It was really too ridiculous. Her kindly little face was crimson. She was glad John had not heard her so specified. It must have been her black dress and hat, for she still wore mourning for Uncle Herbert Plummer, who died the past winter. She began

to wonder if it was too late to break up her home and begin anew. Was the time past for her to catch up with this younger generation?

Then she began thinking of Harriet — five years at a social-service school — Harriet would be twenty-two, Densie forty-two, and John forty-four. Sally would be twenty, and Kenneth, eleven; Maude Hatton and Lucy Parks and Sam Hippler very old indeed — perhaps dead. She considered these things in a ponderous fashion.

Reaching the old-fashioned gate she stooped down and carried Kenneth up the winding path to balance him skillfully over one hip as she unlocked the door. She put him to bed with unusual swiftness — Densie never did anything very quickly because she always took infinite pains — and came back to leave the key in the box of geraniums. She did the little chores about the house which she could not have enumerated if anyone had asked her, "Why don't you go right to bed?" The drip pan under the ice box, the clocks to be wound, the shades drawn just so, the waste cans set out for collection — then upstairs into the bedrooms to turn back the spreads with a loving hand.

She came into her and John's room — an old-time enormous place with high gilded ceilings, windows with walnut cornices, and the furniture that Aunt Sally and Uncle Herbert had given them on their wedding day. She sat beside the window and looked out at the soft June night. She wondered if she would better begin her retrospection now or wait until to-morrow. She could not refrain from wondering how it would seem to break up this home of nineteen years — she was impatient to get at the actual destruction.

Then she glanced at the clock. No, she would best go to bed, for to-morrow had an unusual burden of cares

brought about by the graduation, and when she was alone to-morrow afternoon she would begin systematically, after the fashion of a prosecuting attorney, to review her own and John's lives and decide on what was best.

After which she undressed and knelt beside her bed to say the same timeworn prayer Aunt Sally had taught her to lisp. No one else in the family prayed. It was like a multitude of things her family had ceased doing, and other equally strange ones they had begun to do, without her consent or her knowledge. Just the old lady of thirty-seven came humbly night and morning to ask for everyone's well-being but her own.

She was awakened when her husband returned at nearly one o'clock.

"They had a remarkably pretty dance," he said as he lit the gas. "By Jove, I never light this stuff but what I wish we had electricity. Beastly!"

He threw the match aside.

"Isn't it very late?" Densie asked.

"Well, a girl doesn't graduate every day. Too bad you didn't arrange for someone to stay with Kenneth."

"Oh, I wanted to come home. I saw Harriet receive her diploma."

"Quite an essay, the teachers say. Did she tell you about the scholarship? Remarkably quiet about it, wasn't she?"

"I did not know there was such a school."

"Nor I. What a lot of new things there are — eh, Densie? Even in our day it was different from Aunt Sally's. Well, shall we let her go?"

Densie smiled. "I'm afraid she will go with or without anyone's letting her."

At which John bridled.

"Nonsense! A girl's place is home — unless her par-

ents see fit to let her go away. I've no objection to ha ing her try it. She will be glad to come back inside of s months and be — well — be — be at home," he ended i helpless masculine confusion.

Densie did not contradict; she was thinking of t morrow and her own personally conducted tour into tl past — and future.

" Don't forget to look in at Kenneth," she said politel " and see if he is covered. He coughed all morning, noticed."

II

After Saturday luncheon Densie drew the front shades and departed for the attic. After all, the attic is the proper place to become retrospective. What else can so inspire and remind one of the past?

She had done her Sunday baking and her Sunday marketing while the girls had supposedly cleaned the front parlors and set the library in order. Their own rooms they insisted were superfluously clean, and as there was a class picnic for Harriet to attend and a sewing club for Sally, while Kenneth went to play at a neighbor's, and John was out of town on business until Monday, Densie was unmolested in her planning of the revolution.

She ran up the attic steps eagerly, closing the door with a careless bang. It seemed good to be alone, to be able to sit and think first of herself and then of others as affecting her — not of others first and of herself as helping them. As she glanced about the roomy old place heaped with conglomerate trash and treasures it occurred to her there must be many other women in America in the year of 1901 who would be glad to come to such an attic. and leaning on the crutch of the past find themselves! The first thing Densie decided upon, with a bit of a smile on her firm little mouth, was that the only place for the new woman to plan her revolt was in a stereotyped Victorian attic bespeaking the old-school wife, mother, housekeeper — all combining into the phrase of "unthanked drudge." In an attic one gathers irrevocable evidence of past wrongs or misunderstood deeds, munitions for the coming fight of reform and reconstruction.

She drew up a rocking-chair, an old-style black-walnut monstrosity that had belonged to Aunt Sally's mother, and sitting in the middle of the floor, the June air making her slightly languid even as to thoughts, she began to re-live the past.

She was a pretty thing in her quaint way as she sat there rocking to and fro, nodding or shaking her head, smiling or wiping away a tear with her reddened little hand decorated only by a plain gold wedding band. The dark blue eyes had turned purple just as if she were in a novel and were half-closed, their thick lashes shading the exact expression. Her house frock of crisp blue was without style, but it made a pretty splotch of color, and who ever heard of modishness prevailing in an attic? Besides, the long skirt hid her ungainly house boots, which her daughters laughed at and urged her to discard.

The entire memory was like a delicate painting on yellowed ivory! She began with the consistency with which she had been both endowed and taught from the very beginning. It was a rare sad pleasure to remember it all again; she wondered if many women did so, especially after they had been called old ladies.

To begin, then: There had been two of the most delightful persons in the world — Sally and Herbert Plummer —" just as if they had stepped out of a storybook," Maude Hatton used to say; and though they had everything else in the world they could desire, after waiting many years they realized that no child was to come to take their name and prove worthy of their love. So it happened that when Sally Plummer's widowed younger sister Densie died, leaving a little daughter, also Densie, Sally and her husband adopted her, giving her their name and loving her as if she had been their own.

From the earliest of earlies Densie remembered Aunt

Sally's charming self bustling about in order to make everyone a little happier if she could, and Uncle Herbert, poet-dreamer and owner of a great and mysterious warehouse, to which she was taken on rare occasions. She recalled some of the thousand and one beautiful happenings and possessions, but she restrained the actual memories until John Plummer came into Aunt Sally and Uncle Herbert's keeping — in 1870; a handsome lad of eight, Uncle Herbert's nephew, whose parents were lost in a shipwreck off the Bermuda coast and who was welcomed by Aunt Sally as little Densie had been welcomed.

She remembered hearing her aunt say the evening the news reached them of the wreck and little John's survival: "Herbert, God has given us a son!"

And her uncle had taken Aunt Sally in his arms and told her that even in his grief he was happy.

There was one old chair — why, it was the identical one in which she was rocking! — that had always held a vital memory for Densie Plummer. She had been doing spool crochet— a lamp mat for Ellen Porch, the hired girl. There were hired girls in those days. She had been sitting in this big chair, her copper-toed, red-leather boots in a horizontal line with her chunky little self, rocking serenely and knitting industriously, wondering if Ellen Porch so much as suspected that a lamp mat was being made for her benefit. Aunt Sally came bustling in — she never walked — and stood before her, her pretty face all smiles, and tears in her big bright eyes.

"Densie-daughter, if you could have your choice of anything in the world — what would it be?"

Densie had drawn a deep breath — she had been a deliberate little creature even then — and had shut her eyes tight until they crinkled in order to concentrate properly. After wavering a long time between black-lace

mitts like Aunt Sally's best and a baby doll and a pink cradle such as Uncle Herbert said he had once seen in Paris, she finally let mercenary desires die away and the big wish of her heart be voiced:

"A brother."

Then she opened her eyes to see if Aunt Sally was concealing such a personage in the voluminous folds of her peachblow silk.

Aunt Sally laughed, striking her little hands together and almost jumping up and down.

"You shall have your wish," she said like the veritable fairy godmother; "a real big brother, named John — a handsome lad, they say — two years older than you; so you'll have someone to fight your battles. Come, let's go upstairs and see to his room, for Uncle Herbert has gone to New York to fetch him."

Ellen Porch's mat forgotten, Densie had scrambled to the floor and dashed upstairs planning to place her worldly treasures as a welcome to the new brother.

As she had heard thirty-one years ago of her new "brother" while rocking in the old walnut chair, so she sat rocking planning her revolution!

Then came the happiest day of her life — the very happiest. It so often occurs when one is no older than six or seven! Never again could that first fine careless ecstasy return — nor would she want it. She would not have the child's innocent faith with which to enjoy it.

It was on just such a warm June day — a few weeks after John had come to them — and Ellen Porch was doing her Saturday-morning baking while Aunt Sally prepared to drive to market with Uncle Herbert. Their red-wheeled cart with its two fat ponies, Shag and Baba, waited impatiently at the curb. Aunt Sally wore a wood-brown wool dress with regiments of funny shiny buttons

and a bonnet with plump little roses flopping all about. On one arm was a huge basket and a beaded purse was on the other, and she was warning Ellen Porch about enough sweetening in the pies. Ellen Porch, tall, gaunt and calico clad, was arguing a trifle — Densie could not remember it connectedly; then Ellen Porch began to declaim about face powder and cold creams and said that the young misses were greasing themselves like sausages and what sort of skins would they have when it came time to wear caps, she'd like to know.

And then Aunt Sally had looked down and spied Densie, and said with one of her quick lovely smiles: "Ellen, I believe you are ready for an assistant. If John can have a pony Densie ought to help bake."

At which Ellen Porch grinned and agreed. Then she lifted Densie on to a chair and gave her a bit of dough and an imitation rolling pin, some cinnamon for ornamentation and a few raisins; and Aunt Sally left, promising to taste the concoction she should make. As she sat in the chair demurely patting the dough and feeling the world was really the heaven of which Aunt Sally and Uncle Herbert talked so often — though she would never dare mention their error — she looked out the window into the kitchen garden and saw her new and worshiped brother John astride his pony, old Barney leading him up and down, John in a brave plaid suit, a wooden sword at his belt, killing vicious lions, which he declared skulked about the lettuce bed. There was a smell of roses and honeysuckle; and the hot sweet odor of Ellen's cake just turned out to "sweat," and the pungent fragrance of baking bread. There was the clean old-time kitchen with its rows of pots and pans; and Ellen, kindly genius, helping Densie make a star out of her dough.

Well, she did not know just wherein lay the great joy

— was it John keeping guard over the garden, or the garden itself, or the little pat of fast blackening dough? It was all of it or perhaps none of it. She knew Ellen Porch told Aunt Sally, "That child's eyes were stars and her cheeks as red as roses — just over a mite of dough." She had thought she would like to stop living, to have herself and John and Ellen — and the dough — all step into a picture frame and stay just so; and have Aunt Sally and Uncle Herbert come and coax them to step out; and perhaps, if they felt very badly about the matter, they might do so after they had become too happy to be able to stand still in the frame!

That day of all days — her very wedding day even, and the birth of the children — stood out in Densie's memory. She had known the joy of the very heights. Scattered — like raisins through a pudding, as she whimsically fancied — were other momentous occasions. Ranking in sharp contrast with the supreme joy was the time John confided that he was about to die — it must have been a year or so later; he knew he was going to die, and he left her his sword, his love and his speckled hen! At which Densie tore into the house to upset Aunt Sally's sacred whist club with the news —"John is a-dyin' in the shed!" Followed by a stampede of rustling silk petticoats and tapping feet to where John lay in state, groaning in agony.

After he had been brought, muddy boots and all, into the drawing-room and lay on Aunt Sally's lap Ellen Porch stalked in to dispel the threatened tragedy. In one hand was that dread and familiar bottle; in the other the pewter medicine spoon.

"Mis' Plummer," she said briefly, "don't get upset. That child has been stuffing himself at the Wild West Show. Densie, hain't he told you all he had? Tell the

truth! He's just brim full o' bile. Set up, John! Open your mouth quick — or it'll spill on the carpet!"

"Isn't there any cake to take the taste away?" he had wailed as he prepared for the castor oil.

"Quite enough cake," Aunt Sally answered, laughing in spite of herself and ordering him off to bed. "Densie, I believe you've lost a whole year's growth — you look frightened to death. Go lie down, dear; and the next time your Uncle Herbert takes John to a Wild West show I shall have a word beforehand."

Then there were the wonderful summer evenings when Uncle Herbert hitched up the ponies and took the old family carriage holding a quiver full for a drive, everyone singing hymn tunes or Willie, We Shall Miss You, and upon their return lining up in the kitchen for milk and drop cookies.

So much had changed so subtly — where had vanished the old-time habit of blowing tobacco smoke in ears to cure an ache? It had been almost a treat to have an earache if one had that method of treatment. Densie remembered sitting on Uncle Herbert's knee of a Sunday afternoon while he diligently puffed into her pink ear and said, "Better, daughter?" turning to Sam Hippler, then a dashing beau, to continue:

"I can't agree, Sam, that there aren't useless miracles of our Lord. Take the walking on the water — what can that teach or inspire? Call me heathen if you like — I — er — would not mention this to Sally — but I cannot grasp the intent of the miracle. . . Now, daughter, is that better? Lay your head down ——"

And Aunt Sally bustled in with a little silk pillow for Densie's brown head, pausing to say, "Herbert, were you mentioning useless miracles of our Lord? Out with it, Sam — you two boys caught talking heresy!"

"At least admit it is a proper topic for Sunday afternoon," Uncle Herbert would protest, while Sam, whose whole soul was concentrated on his yellow flowered waistcoat, would give Densie a rakish wink; and that made the ear stop aching altogether.

"I'll take to the Pale Jade Mountains, Sally, dashed if I won't," Uncle Herbert would tease, while Aunt Sally in her summer Sunday frock of pale yellow would admonish soberly:

"There are no useless miracles of our Lord, Herbert and Sam. It is a sign to us that it is good to attempt the impossible — just as he walked upon the water."

Then she remembered Aunt Sally's saying, just before her death, that this was coming to be the age of purple plush and white poodles instead of lavender lawn and little children. For some reason the two sayings struck her forcibly just now. Aunt Sally's spirit seemed to hover over the attic — helping her to remember so vividly that it almost seemed reality. She could even recall the smell of the eau de cologne that Aunt Sally used on Sundays or for parties — perfumes were not considered proper for every day. But then — there had been gentlewomen then, and not genteel!

Uncle Herbert seemed standing in the doorway saying, "Well, children, shall I tell you all about the broomsquires? Sure you won't be afraid when you go to sleep? Your aunt said I must not tell you about them any more."

At which they would fling themselves at him, demanding the tales of English broomsquires and their mysterious thatched huts on lonely moors — no matter if they shuddered themselves to sleep in stoical silence.

Or Uncle Herbert's Latin phrases when he wished to be impressive — Aunt Sally was quite proud of them — his *de gustibus non est disputandum* when something with

which he disagreed came to his notice; or *semper paratus* when Aunt Sally met some emergency; or ***humanum est errare*** when a fellow brother fell by the wayside. He was also given to the language of flowers and gems, the names and origins of states and territories, and was even guilty of trying to conduct the postage-stamp flirtation with Aunt Sally when away on a business trip!

His favorite way of teasing Aunt Sally was in answering her questions as to the prospect of to-morrow's weather, for he would invariably begin Doctor Jenner's:

> The hollow winds begin to blow,
> The clouds look black, the glass is low.
> And soot falls down, the spaniels sleep,
> And spiders from their cobwebs peep.
> Last night the sun went pale to bed,
> The moon in halos hid her head,
> The boding shepherd heaves a sigh,
> For see, a rainbow spans the sky.
> The walls are damp, the ditches smell,
> Closed is the pink-eyed pimpernel.
> Hark! How the chairs and tables crack.
> Old Betty's bones are on the rack.

And so on to:

> My dog's so altered in his taste —
> Quits mutton bones on grass to feast.
> And see, yon rocks how odd their flight!
> And see, precipitate the fall
> As if they felt the piercing ball!
> 'Twill surely rain, I see with sorrow!
> Our jaunt must be put off to-morrow!

"I take it," Aunt Sally would say, her mouth twitching with amused impatience, "you think we ought not to go!"

Yet Herbert and Sally Plummer had been Darby and Joan to the end, Sally a keen-minded woman of charm and brains, a housewife first and last, but with rare understanding of the world and its ways — the world of her time, however. In the two children, John and Densie, utterly different yet equally interesting, she had found her greatest joy.

Their house, The Evergreens, had been a square red-brick affair with numerous green shutters, pine trees closing in on four sides, leaving only a narrow flagstone walk by way of entrance. It had been a wedding gift to Aunt Sally from her parents, and was situated in what was then a remote part of a growing Eastern city, and safe from encroaching commerce, they estimated.

Their ideas in house furnishings resolved into a generous compromise, for in those days homes were large enough to permit freedom of ideas as well as large families. To please Aunt Sally there were long mirrors in black-and-gold frames, Dolly Varden lounges with plum-colored damask curtains, endless whatnots and china shepherdesses on the tall mantles; while Uncle Herbert boasted of his Persian vases, a rare edition of Molière, white-marble bowls in which he kept his sentimental bouquets of pansies — offerings to the gods, he called them; at which Aunt Sally retorted they reminded her of smacked cats' faces.

There were old satinwood, mellowed furniture, carved sandalwood boxes, embroidered fire screens and crotch mahogany. It was the day and age when accumulating both the trash and treasure of past generations was the proper caper. Crowding into steam-heated apartments with a small packing box in a janitor's locker was an unknown blight on civilization. Densie could visualize the long entrance hall with its Adam console table, Heppel-

white chairs and a seventeenth-century clock. Black Wedgewood urns were Aunt Sally's pride, while Uncle Herbert comforted himself with Whieldon ware, agate and tortoise-shell teapots brought him from the Orient, and which he kept in a green-lacquer cabinet with ormolu mounts.

Three things about The Evergreens impressed one: First, that, though it was spick and span through the efforts of Aunt Sally and Ellen Porch, it was neither stiff nor formidable; second, that a generous air of plenty pervaded even the four stately guest chambers with their cross-stitched towels and towering wooden beds; last, that no pains were ever spared to make this so — no hurried modern methods of cleaning and cooking were ever tolerated; that here was all of Aunt Sally's life and career, to make and keep a home, just as Uncle Herbert, lovable dreamer that he was, looked to his warehouse as his sole *raison d'être.*

From Uncle Herbert's collection of white-jade animals, which he gathered on his wedding journey through the Orient, to Aunt Sally's dining room glistening with old plate, Jacobean pewter, blue-and-white china, luster ware, and the cupboards bursting with their fat jam and conserve pots — the house was a home. Outside there had been a gleaming white pergola surrounded by splashes of brilliant color and clipped bay trees at either side; here blue, pink and yellow snapdragons and the gayest phlox in the world were made to bloom for little Densie's pleasure. There was a lily pool aglow with loveliness and glimmering with dragon flies, while soft yellow roses twined a latticework, with the sun shining down in approval. Over the flower garden and croquet court Densie and Uncle Herbert ruled supreme, while Aunt Sally and John commanded the kitchen and vegetable garden,

the dovecot, the stable with its fat ponies, and a certain antique washtub, where John's turtle swam at leisure.

Just as Aunt Sally looked out for colds and hurts, overruled Ellen Porch in matters of housekeeping, bought or made the clothing for her family and had Sam Hippler, Uncle Herbert's confidential clerk, tell her as to the real status of the business — so Uncle Herbert had seen to it that John and Densie knew the proper fairy tales and took them on woodsy expeditions and to the pantomime; in general serving as a court of appeal when Aunt Sally's discipline threatened.

In the drawing-room of The Evergreens was everything imaginable, from Uncle Herbert's flute with his old music rack and its tattered Italian serenade and opera scores — he was one of a quartet meeting during the winter season — to Aunt Sally's square piano with its embroidered cover and stool and the Snowdrop Waltz or Ever of Thee in prim invitation on the rack. There were a chessboard and backgammon set, an open fireplace with a pile of fagots and great brass firedogs — everything at once homey and delightful yet properly in order through the magic of housewifely fingers.

There was everything in the way of art, from still-life paintings by Dutch artists, family portraits, war engravings of enormous size framed in walnut, to useless fancy heads, bronze plaques and dried flowers under glass! There was no definite, maddening scheme of things to crowd out personality and swell the interior decorator's bill. There were horsehair chairs and tapestry chairs and the huge leather one where Uncle Herbert napped on a Sunday when both sermon and dinner had been a trifle ponderous. In the tall bookcases were volumes of history offset by frivolous novels concerning wasp-waisted heroines who fainted conscientiously on each page; the

latter Aunt Sally read the year she graduated from the Young Ladies' Seminary at Athol Springs, Virginia. There were poetry books, Shakspere, the Bible in various editions; Densie's special shelf with her Dotty Dimples and Little Colonial stories — all the absurdly virtuous infantry for her rather skeptical blue eyes to read; and John's special shelf containing Rollo, Sea Fights, Life of General Washington, Tales from the Alhambra, Tom Jones, Robinson Crusoe, and so on. Everything had its fair chance at representation.

Massive curtains and drapes adorned the drawing-room windows, awesome and much admired when Aunt Sally's afternoon clubs met. There were dotted, frilly, ball-trimmed things in Densie's room and lacy affairs in the guest chambers, while in the apartments of Aunt Sally and John were amusing crisscrossed panels, so starched as to make one waken with energy at the mere glancing at their rigor.

The day of the woodshed and the fence was rampant. The woodshed was where John had his trapeze and endless flutter-budges, as Aunt Sally indulgently called them; where the neighborhood boys met for secret pirate clubs at which Densie was a despised and rejected member, and where the old-style appliances for the garden found a dignified resting place, where Ellen Porch and Barney found time to exchange the gossip of the day, and where the trapdoor opened into the vegetable pit through which John, playing kidnapper, had thrust Densie too roughly for her peace of mind and her white apron. Here was where John carved a cradle as a peace offering and presented it to Densie's youngest "child"; and where he likewise kept her sitting on the top of the coal bin while he teasingly demanded: "Would you rather be a bigger fool than you look or look a bigger fool than you are?"

In this atmosphere of home — with its slowness of action resulting in a sureness of result — the two children had grown up, with Aunt Sally's delightful practicability and wit and tender heart — besides her wonderful cooking! — and Uncle Herbert's poetical scholarly self as excellent guides.

After the conventional education of a girl of her time, so carefully shielded from the world, Aunt Sally took Densie just before her sixteenth birthday to the Young Ladies' Seminary at Athol Springs where Aunt Sally had attended, and at eighteen John was sent to Europe to see the world, as befitted a young man about to take up partnership in the house of Plummer & Plummer.

When Densie said good-by to this brother-boy he had whispered, contrary to the years of teasing, careless play: "Don't forget me, Densie. I'll have something to tell you when I come home — if you'll let me."

She must have been rather pretty, she thought as she recalled the incident — for she had worn a creamy flowered challis and a broad leghorn hat loaded with violets, and John had taken her in his arms and kissed her gently, as he had never done before.

She was only sixteen — a year younger than Harriet, who seemed a child in all save her books; a year older than Sally, who was as precocious as a girl of twenty. It seemed a lifetime past instead of a matter of years!

With John's words in her heart and the memory of his strange kiss on her lips she had gone dutifully to the seminary and had done her aunt credit, with John writing from Paris and Berlin, now Florence, where he waxed sentimental and proposed way ahead of time — "the young scamp!" Uncle Herbert tried to scold — and from London just before he was sailing home, after he had Densie's little note saying, "I love you, John."

To their uncle and aunt's delight they decided to wait until Densie was eighteen and John was twenty — not unusual ages then — to be married. Young again in their romance Aunt Sally began the usual preparations for a wedding while the usual romantic courtship took place, Densie being somewhat of her aunt's make-up and John a trifle of his uncle's, tinged, however, with a more forceful and magnetic personality and a rare personal beauty, much to his annoyance. Densie was not beautiful — a small apple-dumpling sort of girl with her dark blue eyes and thick brown braids, tilted delightful features that were made to be kissed, John assured her.

Aunt Sally and Ellen Porch took Densie in hand to teach her housekeeping, housekeeping from the front porch to the woodshed, from the fruit cellar to the attic cupola and all that goes therein.

"I want you to be able to stuff raw cabbage with country sausage and have it taste as mine does," Aunt Sally warned her, "and cook a piece of brisket until it tastes like the finest cut, and make bread like Ellen Porch, and do up your winter preserves and dry your corn and apples — those things are tests of a good housekeeper. Never mind showing me a woman's parlor — let me see her kitchen waste pail and I can tell you whether or not her husband has made a mistake."

After Densie had accomplished this — and more — Aunt Sally and Uncle Herbert confessed that their wedding present would be the "Little House on the Hill" — just as Aunt Sally's parents had given her The Evergreens. It seemed to be a little house in comparison, and The Evergreens would seem twice as large, now that both the children would be gone. But then, as Aunt Sally insisted, her eyes kindly yet misty, they would be back at the old house probably more than was good for them, and

no one would realize they had really set up an establishment all their own.

So they named it the Little House whereas it was a good-sized brick dwelling, also square and practical, and built on the hill so Densie could look down at the roof of The Evergreens whenever she grew lonesome. Already business was beginning to creep about The Evergreen and Uncle Herbert looked aghast at the incoming shops, which sold hides and harnesses or made cheap clothing, their owners living in rooms at the rear.

Aunt Sally had declared she would do nothing toward settling Densie's house, while all the time her basket of mop cloths together with Ellen Porch's awaited her pleasure in the woodshed. From the time of Densie's formal announcement — at seventeen — she actually neglected The Evergreens for the settling of the Little House.

Outside the Little House Uncle Herbert planted a magnolia tree for good fortune, and a garden something like the one at The Evergreens. Inside Aunt Sally did not allow him to be admitted. Every room in the house had an open fireplace and a cupboard, and the walls were tinted instead of papered. The living room was in bronze and gold and tawny shades with stone-colored curtains attractively stenciled, and soft carpets, armchairs and many cushions, samplers framed in rosewood together with family portraits.

An upright piano of carved ebonized wood with candle brackets came for Densie and a mahogany secretary — " for John to figure up Densie's extravagances," Sam Hippler declared — while odd pieces of curly maple with a hint of French blue in their upholstering found their way quite naturally about. They named their rooms — it was only decent, according to Aunt Sally, as any respectable woman names her child before it is twenty-four hours

old — Jungle and Peep o' Day and Moonshine, in accordance with the romantic tendency; a step in advance from North Chamber and South Chamber but, as Aunt Sally further said, " I suppose in keeping with the age! "

Lavender bags found their way between the piles of snowy linens, the shelves were filled with preserves and there was a good-sized woodshed in the Little House and a white fence about the generous yard.

Then ——

" Mother! Where in this world are you? "

It was Sally rushing up the attic stairs!

III

Densie jumped up from the chair and pretended t
busy herself over a packing box. "Yes, my dear. D
you want anything?"

Smiles and frowns all in one Sally bounded into th
attic.

"What are you doing here? I've shouted my he
off for you. Ken is home and hungry as a bear, and
am I. Harriet is going to stay at Miss Blake's for su
per." Miss Blake was her favorite teacher. "I can
up here"— Sally looked her most bewitching —"to a
about the dance at Nelly Morgan's on Monday. Dea
wants to take me."

Densie pushed a wisp of hair back and wondered i
Sally knew how her hand trembled. It is hard to b
called suddenly out of the past without warning and t
have to conceal the fact.

"Why — I don't know, Sally, you've been to so man
parties lately, and you really are a little girl ——"

"But everyone goes, and school is out, and it is onl
Dean — you know you trust me with Dean. I promis
not to stay late."

"You stayed late at Harriet's graduation. I told yo
not later than eleven o'clock."

"But that was father's fault; he was having such
good time he wouldn't come away," Sally dimple
"You ought to have stayed, too, mummy; you're such
quiet dear." She came and slipped her arms round he
waist. "Please say yes; I'll be terribly good, and g
to church to-morrow."

"You ought not to be bribed to go to church, Sally,

ısie told her gravely. "I went to church because I ed it and it was part of my life. I have tried to make art of you children's lives, but I seem to have failed." The curly chestnut head was laid lovingly on Densie's ulder. After all, no one could refuse Sally. She had ay with her, as her father said.

'I know, mummy darling, but that was long, long ago before de wah '— now wasn't it? We can't always on doing just the same. If no one did differently we'd cannibals just as we used to be — wouldn't we?" She sed her head audaciously and laughed. "Your eyes yes — there's an old trump! Harriet is smart ıugh for the family. I'm just silly Sally, and I have dance — I have to! My feet can't keep from tapping ıenever I hear music. I dance in my dreams, mummy. dn't you ever?"

"Why, no, not that I remember."

"Then I can go? And you'll be a perfectly adorable gel-duck and finish my cherry-silk frock?"

Densie frowned. "What is the matter with the one u wore last night?"

"It is so old-fashioned, mummy. I do wish you'd buy tter patterns!"

"It is beautiful material and the lace is real. My unt Sally had that lace when she was a bride."

"But Aunt Sally is dead and gone," Sally insisted flip-ntly. "I'd rather have my cherry silk even if it is ıeaper — and have it made like other girls' dresses. lease, mumsey, I'll do the dishes so you can have time sew. Oh, I'd like a different dress for every party!"

She began dancing round the attic, her head nodding ıyously.

"Will you ever simmer down, Sally, and apply yourself : school?"

"Tra-la-la, I don't know nor care — tra-la — Oh, mummy, I hate attics! Old, musty things! Why don't you have a bonfire?"

Densie smiled. "Perhaps I will. Now we'll go downstairs. I did not realize how late it was getting."

"But you will finish the dress?" Sally was not going to descend the stairs until she had a promise.

"Yes," Densie said briefly, but she was not thinking of the dress but of her interrupted retrospection; she would wait and finish it that night as she sat up to sew and wait for Harriet. Densie never went to bed until the girls were home unless they were with their father. She used to sit up for John until he began being away so often and until so late. She had forced herself to grow used to his absence.

After supper, Sally having made Kenneth trot to and fro with the dishes and then rewarded him by cutting out soldiers and mounting them on cardboard, Densie took her sewing up to her room and prepared to finish her retrospection.

She fitted the dress on Sally first, Sally standing impatiently first on one leg and then on the other and twitching nervously as her mother dallied in the adjustment of the flounces.

"There — that looks better," she said with unconscious patronage. "The silver sash just makes it —— Oh, mother, I can't wait until I'm twenty! Twenty must be a wonderful time! What were you doing then?"

"Harriet came to me at twenty, so I was very busy — with my housekeeping and my new daughter."

"But you had a maid, didn't you — that Renie Smith?" Sally smiled at her pretty self in the glass.

"Yes, but there is a great deal of work in a house this size, and Harriet was colicky."

"Oh." Sally began to plume her skirt and try a different angle of adjustment regarding the sash. "I want to be married when I'm twenty, but I want to travel and wear beautiful clothes and just be admired. Harriet doesn't; she is terribly queer, mummy; she wants to do funny things. I can't understand — I wish we didn't have this big house with such old-fashioned things in it, don't you?"

"It was my home, Sally; I cannot help but love it."

"I know, but we haven't hardwood floors or electric lights or a telephone — like other people have; and it is so far away from downtown. I should think you would have died of loneliness."

"I was happy." Densie unpinned the dress and took it off.

"Thanks, mummy."

Sally carelessly kissed the tip of Densie's ear for a good night and pirouetted to her room to try, in deadly secret, the effect of some new rouge. When she was twenty she would rouge all she wished; one commands the world at twenty — except funny, old-fashioned mummies saddled by housework and babies and who seem terribly ancient though they are not yet forty!

Sitting beside her oil lamp Densie took up the threads of memory just where she had dropped them. She had been thinking of the wedding at The Evergreens at which Aunt Sally had distinguished herself in a darling combination of black satin and white velvet and Uncle Herbert, due to his emotion, had knocked over two vases filled with flowers, which stood at the head of the bridal aisle!

They had gone on a genuine wedding tour — New York, Philadelphia, Washington and Niagara Falls — Densie in her going-away gown of dove-colored broadcloth quite hopelessly labeled bride. She made a quaint

1882 profile, all pouts and tilts, curves and fussy little rosettes, a small flyaway love of a bonnet with an abrupt slant and a discreet high coiffure, a white mesh veil dotted with black chenille, and high-heeled bronze boots, Size Two A! Her trousseau had been in keeping with this bridal frock — even as John had been the properly sophisticated young husband returned from seeing the world, and boasting of a high silk hat, a double-breasted green paddock coat and a budding mustache — all proof of his worldly experiences!

Returning, the Little House was the scene of a proper housewarming, after which John and Densie settled down according to custom as married members of the community and followed their elders in the matters of orthodox church-going, a Dickens supper club, occasional formal dances, sailing and picnics in the summer, afternoon calls, painstaking housekeeping and sewing and charities — with Aunt Sally dressed in her characteristic black satin and ermine tippet driving up the hill to call for Densie to go a-marketing. Cakes were still made with the whites of twelve eggs and three-quarters of a pound of butter, and one washed one's oilcloth with sour milk so as to preserve it properly — while the rest of the home and cuisine was conducted on an equally slow lavish scale.

John had been a devoted lover-husband then, doing well in the business and affording his uncle leisure for flute practice, garden, surreptitious candy making during Aunt Sally's absence, his harmless hobby of postage-stamp collecting. Uncle Herbert spent more and more time in his study, clad in a scarlet quilted dressing robe and balancing Southey's Common-Place Book on his knee. Sam Hippler piloted the youthful and daring John and kept business afloat, and Aunt Sally had superintended Densie and her little world, her one possession being a pessimistic

faith in the devil, a personal devil at that, who was menacing civilization with his modern and tempting ideas.

Then on a memorable June night in 1884, Aunt Sally had returned from the Little House at midnight, surprising her husband in an arrangement for which he had fought for many months — half a mince pie, an ash tray and a tattered copy of Don Quixote on her best tea table — while she told him that John and Densie had been given a little daughter, " bound to be clever — long black hair and well-defined eyebrows. They are to call her Harriet, after John's mother, which is quite right, though Densie did want a Sally in her family."

Harriet's advent brought even a deeper joy to the family circle than had been before, and two years later came another daughter — Sally this time — round and dimpled and given to much excessive laughter for apparently no reason at all, while Harriet was still a pale quiet baby with dark glowing eyes and " bound to be clever " her great-aunt declared.

There was no denying but what the babies narrowed Densie's life! She dropped the cherry-silk frock to recall just how it had started, just when John's loverliness had not been so marked — business engrossed him, men's club meetings, he was becoming well known and respected, and his interests took him outside of his home. Besides, Densie was always too busy to go places with him or to sit and talk — since she would trust no nursemaid. She would make a slave of herself, John declared, and then finding it of no use to protest he joined a card club that met downtown, and became president of the retail merchants' association.

It was then that Densie realized that the romance of marriage depends upon small attentions; whereas courtship is such a stupendous and breath-taking affair that it

holds nothing but prophecies for a rosy and unreal future.

The small attentions were not discontinued all at once — not for years, to be fair — there were certain pleasant customs that were continued. The good-by kiss, the welcome, the bit of a nosegay on Sundays, the not forgetting anniversaries — bane of any man's existence, no matter how dearly he may love!

But married life became a shade monotonous to John, and to Densie it seemed a never-ending task of teething babies and cooking meals and of having no time to herself in which to sew or read or dream. John was far from rich — Uncle Herbert was spoken of as being " just comfortable "— but he was too much of a dreamer to stay so. And Densie had been taught always to live well within one's income rather than beyond it. So she managed with turned silks and made dishes, which take time rather than expense, and when the carpets were turning shabby she hooked rugs to cover the thin places.

It was in 1893 that the house of Plummer & Plummer suffered a temporary failure; it had been an old house with honorable methods, and tea, coffee and spices its line. Uncle Herbert refused to include anything else; he said he did not feel competent to do so, though John had seen the mistake of this attitude and argued hotly against it. After a very uncomfortable period Uncle Herbert found himself gently slipped out of harness, so to speak, free to wander in the study and garden at will or go to play with Densie's daughters. Sam Hippler remained in charge because Aunt Sally wished it, but it was John who plunged into the business in a new and forceful fashion, finding himself engrossed in the game of commerce and really irritated by petty household details. He had an opportunity to enter politics — how well Densie remembered the night he had come home and told her! — and how glad

she was when the successful campaign had ended and John was elected assemblyman. Ethics had become a trifle dulled in so doing; Densie discovered this as she ransacked the old secretary looking for a bill and had found others that quite surprised her.

Politics absorbed John; it was the way to keep his business afloat, he said, and he began to blame his uncle for not teaching him some profession save selling tea, coffee and spices wholesale and being too highminded to " cheat fairly " as he insisted.

Harriet and Sally had started school — as different as day from night, even then. Harriet all for books and theories, a veritable interrogation point; while Sally stood for beauty, the mere joy of living without questioning the ifs and whys of existence.

John dropped out of church work, he was never free to attend or else he was too tired, and Densie shouldered the double burden because of the girls. She joined a modest sentimental mothers' club and substituted sewing a fine seam for crochet doilies and crape tissue-paper work.

In 1895 Kenneth was born — named Kenneth for Densie's father — and that same year, while Kenneth grew plump and rosy and his mother hardly acknowledged to herself that this third child was closer to her than her girls, Aunt Sally failed. She was more timid and slow of manner, and in 1896 she went to sleep as it seemed leaving The Evergreens a lonely house wedged between foreign rooming establishments, and Uncle Herbert a mourning child.

Densie knew that she must take Aunt Sally's place as well. She bravely dismantled The Evergreens, with twinges of memory and sentiment, transferring all she could of it to the Little House, fitting up Uncle Herbert's

two rooms as duplicates of his old study and bedchamber so he might feel more content to stay. She remembered she had had a dim wondering as to the wisdom of this passing of fashions and customs, and as to whether she belonged with the old régime or was she destined to hurry until she became one of the new? John had shaved off his mustache — he looked a boy, he was told at the club — he was drinking a trifle. "Just enough to be sociable, my dear," he had told Densie; "you've got to come to it if you're to stay in the game."

They had sold The Evergreens to a clothing manufacturer, who gutted the inside and rebuilt according to business plans. Densie never passed the house if she could avoid it; John said she was supersensitive, and the children wondered why she never talked about when she was a little girl at Aunt Sally's without crying.

The three children had developed along individual lines, Harriet a strange scholarly girl, cold of heart, clever of head, but without interest or aptitude for domestic interests. Sally was eternally bubbling over with the joy of existence — unless her will was crossed — too generous, too intense and really too beautiful, even then. To John's annoyance Kenneth proved a gentle girlish nature, which was Densie's secret solace and delight.

And then — here Densie forced herself to pick up the cherry-colored frock and begin work — Uncle Herbert became a burden! There was no denying it — saddest of age's punishments — for he began to dodder about asking inane and inappropriate questions, meddling, inquisitive, sensitive, sulky. Neither Densie nor Kenneth found him a trial, but the girls and John said it was awkward to have him about and it would be a blessing were he taken. Only Densie really bore with the old gentleman, humoring his whims and treating him as gently as he had once

treated her, shielding him from impatience. But it tied Densie in her home, since paid service will not do such things for feeble old strangers.

To a great extent Densie withdrew from the church and social interests and John began to gamble in stocks; there was a good chance of becoming really wealthy he assured her. He drank rather to excess now — in a dangerous, steady sort of way, and was actively interested in all things outside his home. He said it was too bad Densie did not have a half dozen maids —" but you will when I make my ten-strike." And he thought no more of the matter.

Eight months before Harriet's graduation Uncle Herbert had died, thinking that Densie was his wife, Sally, and telling her that " white pink, canary grass and laurel mean your talent and perseverance will win you glory, my dear," gallantly trying to kiss her hand.

It was a relief — more of a relief for Densie than the others, though she missed Uncle Herbert as time went on, for there was no one to whom she could go and still be petted — even if feebly petted.

Now Harriet had won, unbeknown or confided to her mother, a scholarship for a New York social-service school — at seventeen her daughter was convinced she had a mission in life and was planning on a career — a trained statistician, aloof from contact with the poor, but with a cold-blooded theorist's ability for endless figures and undeniable deductions!

Harriet regarded her mother as a nice little thing who said grace before meals and prayers night and morning, keeping Sunday as a day of rest and worship, and who would stir her lady cake a hundred times just as Aunt Sally had taught her. The Little House was an eyesore to Harriet; it was too large, too absurd. She longed to

be alone; her secret plan was for the life of a bachelor girl, a pioneer feminist — and to Densie she was a clever but cruel stranger who had strayed far from her tender heart.

Densie had finished the little dancing frock and hung it on her wardrobe door. She looked at it a moment — since it brought to mind at the close of this long retrospection the fact that Sally at fifteen was an equally distressing problem, always in disgrace at school, where she could not or would not apply herself, besieged with boy admirers, wheedling whatever she liked from her father and spending her time in flippant dressing or reading highly colored romances and running off to matinées with her hair dressed like a woman's.

There was Dean Laddbarry. "Bless Dean!" murmured Densie, for she saw in him the elements of a valuable man, and used to the old-time fashion of casting ahead for young people she wished they might marry as she and John had married, when each was young and fired by ideals.

She must take herself to task for the general condition of unrest and estrangement; she must change with the times as John had changed. To do this she must break up the home! She had finished her thought cycle since she had justified her resolve. It was very clear to Densie just what had brought this all about. John had the responsibility of his family, but Densie had the cares! Responsibilities deadened one to cares and cares made one noncomprehensive of responsibilities!

Therefore it was high time to shake off cares. Harriet had come in and was standing in the doorway smiling superciliously. She was contrasting Densie's weary-looking self in a house dress to Miss Blake's well-groomed, athletic person in a rose-silk dress and a rope

of seed pearls. Miss Blake was forty-five, yet she seemed a girl. She had a pink-and-white complexion and hands as white as any débutante's, and her gray hair was always marcelled and faintly scented with violet. Harriet adored Miss Blake — it had been she who had urged Harriet's aiming for a career, impressing on her that she was meant for something above a house drudge. Miss Blake laughingly admitted that she never darned her stockings or made a cup of coffee. "I'm a bachelor girl, Harriet dear," she had said; "so I'm excused!"

"Mother, I want to ask about New York. Miss Blake is going there the first of August, and she wants me to come with her so she can introduce me to her friends. Do you think daddy will let me?"

"Have you thought well about it?" Densie turned to look at her eldest rebel-daughter. "It is a grave decision; it means five years away from home. We thought you would stay with us and take up something like kindergartening."

Harriet smiled. "As if I could! But you don't understand, mother; it is all so changed since you were a girl. I must go, even if you say no. I've worked alone to win the scholarship — and there were many who tried for it."

"I know, dear, you were very brilliant. Only I'm not reconciled to your leaving us ——"

"There are vacations," she urged.

"But daddy isn't rich, and things cost so much more; and business has changed too."

Densie loyally forgot the club bills and the fiascoes on the stock market.

"Well, I can coach someone perhaps and earn my vacation money. I don't want clothes like Sally — just plain things."

"I must talk it over with your father Monday."

"But if he says no?" Harriet's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"Would you disobey him?"

The old-school beliefs flared up in Densie's bewildered heart.

"Certainly! First of all I am a human being. That is what Ibsen's Nora said."

"I have never read Ibsen."

"I understand that you haven't; but I have and do, and I've the right to my own life."

There was a pause, after which Densie said, "When would you want to go?"

"The first of August," Harriet repeated sharply.

"I see. Would my trunk do?"

"Splendidly. Mummy, can I have all new underwear to start with? I've grown so much taller, and Sally can use the old. She likes to patch things with lace and embroidery. I want plain things — and new; because I won't have time to mend."

"When I went to boarding school we had to account for every missing hook and eye!"

"Boarding school! Mummy, this is a social-service course. It is utterly different." Harriet laughed indulgently. "Miss Blake has told me how wonderful it will be. She took a summer course there and won a fellowship so she traveled in England doing research work." Harriet's eyes glowed.

"Yes, you may have new underwear," was all Densie answered, turning away. After all, the cares will not take themselves off one's shoulder without a deal of hard pushing. No one will voluntarily stand ready to assume them.

IV

Densie and Kenneth practically spent Sunday with each other, the girls going to some friends for the day and John not returning until Monday. It was with a sad sort of pleasure that Densie ordered her son's actions, knowing that he too would presently turn to demand his own rights of speech and action. Even now as she showed him the colored Bible plates his eyes wandered in the direction of the forbidden pea shooter and cardboard soldiers, and his answers were monosyllabic and lackluster.

When John came home for luncheon the next day — he had gone directly to the office on his return — Harriet confronted him with the news that Densie had agreed to her going to New York in August.

"Well, my dear," John began, hardly knowing what to say and being engrossed with a new gambling tangle which promised either success in a large measure or disaster, "I suppose your mother understands what is best for you. We thought you would stay at home with us, Harriet. It is such a big old house it needs a crowd." He was sitting on the porch smoking, Harriet perched on the rail. Sally and Dean and Kenneth were quarreling good-naturedly over croquet on the lawn, and Densie was within clearing off the luncheon débris.

"It is too big a house; mummy has to slave too much. You cannot get help as you once could. This is a new order of things."

Harriet's patronizing manner was most amusing.

"No, but your mother will not stop slaving. I've tried to tell her."

John felt irritated, yet he did not want to woo a domestic harangue. He paid the bills and that ended his part in the home. He was always courteous to his wife and the children and seldom questioned anything they did or said, yet he was becoming a stranger to them though he did not intend it to be that way.

"You're so young looking, daddy," said Harriet thoughtfully, "and Miss Blake is so young looking, and mummy seems old. Yet she isn't old — she was married young, wasn't she? And she has never read." Harriet was thinking out loud.

"Come, come! We mustn't criticize our betters." Her father dropped his cigar into an ash tray and stood up hastily. "I'm going downtown now. Was there anything else you wanted to ask? I'll be seeing you in New York next, I suppose, when I'm there on business."

"It will be heavenly!" Harriet answered with unusual enthusiasm for her. "Think of not having to bother with housework, but study all I want."

"And what will you do when you marry? Feed your husband with Latin verbs and French history?" He smiled down at her.

"I shall never marry," she told him seriously. "Some women are meant for homebodies and some are not. If I were not interested in social service I should read law."

Holding up his hands in mock despair her father went in to find Densie. Harriet dropped into the hammock and began a delightful vision of her future, her freedom as a superwoman, her intended reforms yet her aloofness from humanity as a mass. She would always be kind to her parents, oh, very kind — and to pretty, silly Sally who was going to be foolish enough to marry and become a work slave unless she happened upon a millionaire. In fact, Harriet planned to take care of her family in a sense,

and send Kenneth to an English school so as to make a man of him. She felt he would never be a man so long as his mother was about. She would also read every novel she wished, revolutionary or otherwise; she would join the suffrage movement; she would not go to church, she would deny the absurd old teachings and adopt the new ethical religion with which Miss Blake had allied herself. Musty Bible logic was only for past generations and helpless orphans shut up within four walls. She would dress like Miss Blake as soon as it was possible, in severe yet expensive things made by good tailors, and small untrimmed hats which cost fabulous sums; and she would have an arts-and-crafts ring, massive and masculine, and would wear no other ornament save a watch. She would rent bachelor rooms and furnish them as Miss Blake had furnished hers — with eccentric colors and furniture, limp-leather-bound books and Jap prints. She would always, always live in New York. After the five years at school she could easily see her way to never coming home. She could never stand it; she must have freedom to cut away from her family and to live unhampered by a home!

Meantime, John had surprised Densie in the act of washing dishes. She wore a blue work dress and her hair was a trifle awry.

"Can't the girls do this for you?" he asked gently, an almost dangerous gentleness which betokened a guilty lack of interest.

"They won't do it my way," she explained. "I've tried showing them, but they rattle through without rinsing and use my glass cloth for the pots and vice versa, and Sally has nicked every china dish I have. I would rather do it alone and have it as I wish."

"It seems too bad women get so set on methods."

He sat down at the kitchen table to watch her painstakingly make a soap suds.

"It is the only way to do if you are going to have system. I haven't had time to speak to you alone. Did Harriet tell you her plans?"

"Um. Funny youngster. I suppose we may as well let her try it. She will be so homesick before Christmas she will never mention it again. Fancy, Densie, telling me she never intended to marry. At seventeen you and I were engaged, weren't we?"

He leaned his elbows on the table and smiled at her. He seemed a boy quite out of place in the kitchen with this slightly faded woman.

"Yes, but everything seems changing. I presume Harriet knows her mind. It would do no good to contradict her. Only I'd rather she did not stay away for five whole years ——"

"She won't stay a year," her father declared. "She'll come back and fall in love and make a bigger goose of herself than our Sally — wait and see."

Densie shook her head. "Not Harriet — you remember what Aunt Sally said, 'bound to be clever,' and" — she drew a deep breath as if forcing herself to repress emotion —"you can't be very clever, John, when you have babies and have to stand over a cookstove and haggle with shopkeepers. It wears away the fine edge of keenness."

"Perhaps women will come to be more sensible and stop working so hard and so endlessly. In your day — or Aunt Sally's, rather — there was nothing else expected of them. It was their world. And it is the same in business — it has changed. Sam Hippler would not countenance an adding machine if I did not throttle him into accepting it, and he dislikes the modern stenographer, and

automobiles are to his mind odious evidences of the younger generation. You cannot make him see light. All my life I've been hampered by an old-fashioned setting. I would sell anything from canary birds to shotguns if I had my way; and if we had done so we might have been rich to-day. But Uncle Herbert had a ridiculous notion that books should be sold in a book store and shoes in a shoe store and so on ——"

"Still, he never gambled in stocks," said Densie quietly as she began to wipe the glasses.

"Better men than I gamble in stocks." His face flushed and he looked at her defiantly.

"It is not honestly earned money ——"

"Don't, Densie. You sound like a motto calendar." He rose abruptly. "I'm off now. I don't mind how you run your house and children, but business is my domain."

"Aren't they your house and your children?"

"Of course — only you've always taken to yourself the authority."

"And the labor."

"And the labor," he conceded ungraciously. "But for my business and myself I must ask for freedom. I'm like Harriet. I must do things my own way. If I choose to drink a cocktail and plunge on the curb it is no evidence of degeneracy. Come, be fair! Be as old-time as you like in your heart, but let us outwardly keep pace with the present-day pulse."

"Will you be home for dinner?" she asked awkwardly, really for the lack of something more appropriate to say.

John took it as a rebuff. "No," he answered shortly; "I'm staying downtown to see the end of a three-cushion tournament."

Barely brushing his lips against her cheek he left her, stopping in the hall to gather a light modish overcoat and a Panama hat, which he rakishly tilted over his grizzled head.

Sally came running toward him and hung on his arm.

"Daddy darling," she began, "what are you going to do for me since you've said Harriet could go to New York? Don't you think I ought to have a whole scad of new dresses?"

"Scad? Is that another of Dean's slang words?"

John looked at her admiringly. If Harriet was clever, Sally was beautiful, and John, like most of mankind, preferred to look at Sally.

"Yes — scad means six, I think. A white organdie, a pink poplin, a yellow silk, a ——"

Sally kept on hugging his arm and laying her curly head on his coat sleeve.

"Why don't you help your mother more?"

"She says we can't suit her. Mummy would let me have the dresses if you would. You know I'm going to be your home girl, and I think you might."

"You're only a little girl, Sally. You better finish school and not think of dresses —"

"I shan't let you go unless you promise me two — the pink one and the white one, please — daddy, you're such a dear." Sally knew how to tease.

"If your mother says so," John finally conceded, bending to kiss her, "and now please take yourself off before you've borrowed my watch and chain."

He did not go near Kenneth. A barrier which John could not explain existed between the two. The boy's gentle nature irritated him; he claimed that Densie spoiled and mollycoddled him and he would turn out an inefficient dreamer unable to make his way in the world. It dis-

pleased him really, because Kenneth went to his mother with his woes and avoided his father as much as possible, thinking in his childish way that he was a handsome brave person who despised him because he could not fight the Kelly gang on the corner!

He left the gateway, forgetting, as was usual, to latch it, and left cares behind, after the way of men. Just as when the panic came it was necessary for John to go into politics to retrieve himself, and Densie to do without a maid.

That night, having finished her tasks, Densie sat up for Sally according to custom and glanced through some Sunday papers that John had happened to bring home. She came across a section entitled Woman's Realm, and this she selected for careful consideration. Buried in the accounts of beauty culture and wardrobe secrets she found the report of an address that was delivered by some eminent man before a federation of women's clubs. In part he had said to them:

"For the past few years some of you have been feverishly active in two directions: With the mechanism of living and getting a living, this from physical necessity and with a counterbalancing mental and spiritual antidote to the other. The habit is more or less fixed, and I believe you should all relax for a time, take things as unseriously as possible and get all the joy you can from merely being alive, seeing, breathing, smelling, feeling in a physical sense. If you could accomplish this you would recreate within yourselves the power to do, which has been rather used up in these other directions. No one realizes to-day the drudgery that falls to the lot of conscientious middle-class American women — yet no other class produces such wonderful men and women as a result of this condition, truly the backbone of the nation! But is it

fair to these homemakers? Are time and tide going to allow this condition of drudgery and care to continue unaided or are we approaching a new era? I believe in the latter — and advocate it.

"The sense life has a biologic origin, but I believe it also takes on a spiritual significance and function, and there is a profound truth in the old Greek myth about the hero who drew fresh strength and power from the very contact with the mother earth. When physical conditions of living are not to one's liking there is a great temptation to say, 'Life is not worth living!' But the very fact that we are alive proves to me we must make life worth living. Asceticism is essentially wrong, and just as a tree must have deep roots in the ground so our spiritual growth must be firmly based on the beauties of the sense life. Air plants, orchids, they are rarely beautiful but fragile parasites after all. Remember that there are three great imperatives — self-preservation, self-perpetuation, and finally self-justification, or the *raison d'être.* To achieve these three successfully one must be honestly friends with oneself ——"

Densie dropped the paper. She had added the final plank in her platform!

The family accepted the rental of a new home — an upper flat and extremely modern for 1901 — with applause.

"Sensible little woman," John said, delighted at the prospect of electric lights, hardwood floors and the nearness to downtown. For sometime he had rebelled at having to work in the garden, though it used to be his greatest joy. He would now be able to sit comfortably on an upper veranda and view the passing throng — serene in his lack of duties!

Harriet and Sally also rejoiced, but for diverse reasons; Harriet because she had determined to leave her family except for compulsory vacations, and she had a Puritanical conscience which rebuked her and made her hasten to add to herself that she intended doing very nice things for everyone at home. She could now go away feeling more foot-loose if mummy was in a cosy flat with hardly any work at all. Why, she would be in the way, for there were only three bedrooms!

To Sally the flat meant less work and a more pretentious place to entertain her friends — particularly her boy friends. She planned to rig up the attic room as a studio for her art, and it would be very glorious to be able to run downtown every day inside of a half hour. She planned also on waxing the floors so she could have a small dance, and she would make her mother throw away all the old junk and coax her father to buy modern furnishings.

Only Kenneth did not enthuse. It meant a strip of yard shared with the people downstairs, and his pigeons must be sold and the croquet set given away. There would be no place to establish an Indian camp or a Kit Carson lodge. Though, boylike, all he said when they told him of the change was, "We won't have a woodshed."

The old friends, Maude Hatton and Lucy Parks, came to help Densie pack.

"Are you sure you won't feel sorry?" Maude Hatton demanded.

"Yes; I'm getting too tired to do the work here."

Lucy Parks cleared her throat meaningly, at which Densie hastened to add, "Of course, Harriet is going away, and Sally is a trifle young. Besides, she seems to dislike housework. Then John travels so much, and Kenneth and I are left here alone."

"But it's breaking up a home," Lucy Parks said gravely as she looked at the piles of things awaiting verdict from the secondhand man. "Densie Plummer, you aren't going to sell your Aunt Sally's old warming pan? I remember when she nursed your uncle through pneumonia and I used to heat the iron for her. Maude, will you see this extravagance — all these dresses? There's enough to make Sally a dozen frocks."

"But Sally won't wear the old things," Densie defended. "Take them for yourself if you like."

"And hats!" Another pile was pointed out.

"And books!"

"Sally says you aren't going to take a carpet!"

"We shall have hardwood floors."

"And those dishes — they were Sally Plummer's wedding set." Maude Hatton held up the cover of a soup tureen in accusation.

Densie felt as if she had rifled a shrine.

"I know, but the children want something new — Japanese blue-and-white things."

The old friends exchanged glances.

"I live in one room," Maude Hatton said to Lucy Parks that night as they walked home. "So do you. But our hearts don't live in that room. Tell me the truth, don't you spend your happiest times dreaming about the farm or Sally Plummer's house or your mother's?"

Lucy Parks nervously assented.

"If Sally had lived Densie would never have done this. I'm afraid she's going to regret it."

"Who ever heard of a Plummer living in a flat — in a crowded part of town! Densie — who was brought up at The Evergreens, and who went from there as a bride to her own blessed home!"

"There's nothing we can do to stop it," Maude Hatton decided philosophically; "this day and age is not one to ask advice of elders. I'm saying that Densie is giving up her home, but it is neither her own inclination nor her fault. She looks like a grandmother, and she's a young woman. And John, bless his heart anyway, is like her son! Does John spend his time with Densie? No indeed; I hear of him — he has Densie saddled down with the house and children and off he goes skylarking. Oh, nothing wrong, but he doesn't seem to care for her as Herbert did for Sally, in that steady, settled way."

"They've lost money, so Sam Hippler said."

"Then it is John's gambling." Maude Hatton shook her head. "It hurt to see the old things laid out for sale — it was the children who did it. They are all for the new. Poor Densie, she's her hands full with that family — particularly Sally."

"Harriet is quite as much of a problem. Kenneth is her only joy."

Maude Hatton, who Sally said spent the best part of her life sniffing and wearing huge black bonnets, sniffed in disdain. "A lot a boy cares when he gets him a wife; and a lot a husband cares when his wife skimps to save in order that he may spend. I'm telling you this present way of living in flats and hotels and such places — with the mothers younger looking than the children, and the grandmothers younger looking than the mothers — it is neither fish nor flesh, nor good red herring!"

Sally did persuade her father to buy new things to some extent followed by a terrific battle with her mother because the mission furniture sneered at the black walnut, the new rugs were disdainful of the hooked ones, which Densie stoically placed in the bedrooms, deaf to the torrent of complaints. The steel engravings of Lord Nelson and General Washington were quite out of harmony with red passe partouts of bulldogs and Gibson girls, and when Densie would not sell the piano or trade it in for a player or a talking machine Sally pouted for a day, and declined to take any interest in anything but her meals.

When she saw how white her mother looked and how little energy she seemed to have left she repented in her quick storm-sunshine fashion and tried to do her part.

"It isn't as if we wanted to be known as the ark, mummy," she reproached late the first night they were in the flat. "You'll come to see the difference."

"I suppose so. But after all, do things mean so much — just things?" asked Densie wearily.

She had been preparing temporary beds for her family and was partly relieved, partly disappointed when she had a wire from John saying he would not be home for a

week! It was so much easier to return, smiling and complimentary, to a new and settled household than to endure the discomforts of sleeping on the floor and eating off a corner of the sink!

Sally sat up in her cot bed, her red-gold hair hanging round her face in artistic confusion.

"Yes, mummy dear, things mean everything to me — just as ideas mean everything to Harriet. Everyone has to have something that means a great deal to them — don't they? What means the most to you?"

Her gold eyes were wide open and curious; it had occurred to Sally that underneath this upheaval and removal from the old home her mother must have some definite motive.

Densie smiled. "I don't know, Sally. I've just given up the things that used to mean a great deal — and now I'm going to find something else."

Harriet worked more conscientiously than Sally in the settling; it mattered nothing to her whether a picture was hung here or there, a certain ancient vase placed on the mantel or an old-fashioned book on the table. If Densie still wished the curtains looped back with bows despite Sally's outburst of temper — Harriet calmly and unfeelingly looped them back. She was going away very soon — there was no point to be gained by arguing. So she was a temporary comfort to Densie even though she smiled to herself at the rather conglomerate result of the moving.

After all, one cannot stop being of the past era and become one of the new without a reconstruction period, and Densie, after the flat was settled and John had returned with bad business news and rather bloodshot eyes — Densie found that the people eternally tramping downstairs or playing on a talking machine or having late card

parties annoyed her beyond measure. She felt as if she were only temporarily located, that she must take Kenneth — she always thought first of Kenneth — and return to the Little House, opening the old doors of the big front hall and breathing in its heavenly peace — and cleanliness! She never felt the flat was properly clean. This new way of mops and dust rags saturated in oil bewildered her. Reaction had set in. The sight of the old belongings jostled together with the new made her homesick. She had to admit, as she sewed on Harriet's underwear between her other duties, that she was still too emotional to be really efficient in the carrying out of her original intention.

The old home had lent a certain poise and dignity which soothed her. Here she was continually contrasted with the woman downstairs — a bride, though nearly Densie's age. John and Sally both liked Mrs. Sullivan. She knew how to make the most of herself with her clothes and looks; she was always pleasant and ready for a jolly afternoon; she cooked carelessly but lavishly; her waste can made Densie long to take her to task even as Aunt Sally would have done. It was nothing for her to throw away half of a loaf of bread or half of a stale cake or the remains of a good roast. She was fond of telephoning a hotel to send up sandwiches and salad, and then she would make coffee and thus round out a meal. Her husband adored her — they had been married only a year — and life seemed cast in pleasant channels for Densie's neighbor.

Of course, there was nothing to worry or annoy Mrs. Sullivan. She went out a great deal, very fashionably dressed, and was even talking of buying an automobile as soon as they became a little cheaper.

John used to talk about her to Densie. "She's such a

good fellow," he would say. "I can't see why you don't like her. Sally does. And did you know she gave Kenneth a plate of ice cream?"

"Yes," Densie would concede; "she is a kind neighbor, I suppose."

"She isn't much younger than you," he would begin.

"She has never had a family. She has never worked in her life except in an office. Her house is always unclean ——"

"Well, it's livable, and Sullivan looks well fed. Sometimes I think housework spoils a woman's ability to enjoy life. We're asked down there for a game of cards tonight. Will you go?"

And rather than seem ungracious and refuse Densie would go, wearing an old-style dress, her hair combed tightly back, while Mrs. Sullivan in frilly white, her pretty hands just manicured, a suggestion of Parma violets about her hair and skin, would play partners with John and make great eyes at him, enjoying the discomfiture of her husband and of John's wife.

After they would come upstairs John would say, "Why don't you get a dress like hers — and let her fix up your hair?"

"If I fit Harriet out and let Sally take painting lessons and you get the fall clothes you say you must have — where can I afford such a dress? I will make my old things do a little longer."

During the summer the women's clubs were suspended from meeting save for a basket picnic, so Densie was stopped from her intentions of joining, but she modestly selected the Progressive Thought Club, the Opera Reading Club and a course in punctured brasswork, then the fad, as her winter's program. She was quite shy about it even to herself, but she used to lie awake nights planning

how she could attend the meetings and not neglect her housework, and how, after a little, John's business would be better and she would buy some new clothes, and then he would be proud of her.

It cost a great deal more to live in the flat than at the Little House, which was another disappointment. The Little House had been sold for a sacrifice; it was already mortgaged. Somehow Sally had more friends in for small parties, and John felt they must entertain the Sullivans and like people, and their requirements of food and ice and help all seemed to multiply in mysterious fashion. Whenever Maude Hatton or Sam Hippler or Lucy Parks came to supper the children would fidget rudely, and even John was a trifle curt. Twice he made Densie telephone them that they had another engagement.

"It means so much to them," Densie had protested; "they never have a home supper except when they come here."

"Then send up some stuff. Maude Hatton gets on my nerves. She's always quoting Scripture," he answered lightly. "If it wasn't for my uncle's wishes I'd have discharged Sam a year ago."

Meantime the piles of underwear for Harriet mounted high and snowy, with Harriet marking the tapes H. Plummer, in her firm, cramped little writing. She sewed as many dreams and visions into the fastening on of the tapes as does a bride embroidering her wedding gown. Densie suspected that Harriet's extreme obedience and affability came from the fact that she had not much longer to stay at home. She made several futile attempts to win her daughter's confidence, but they were all of no purpose. Harriet was polite and gentle, even very tender with her mother — the mother who could not understand; but she had a way of shutting outsiders from her

heart as if she actually closed a well-barred door in the face of a would-be visitor in her home.

With her father she was remarkably polite and aloof. John rejoiced in the fact that Harriet never bothered anyone. Manlike, he saw no more of what was taking place in his elder daughter's heart. He was proud of her brain, proud of the scholarship, and he thought very little of the years ahead. Of course, she would marry; and that was all there was to it.

Sally was a more direct problem, though he loved Sally in a different fashion. But she annoyed him. He had watched her unawares when she was downtown, walking with boys, her head coquettishly tilted, her eyes sparkling, the finesse of a famous coquette.

When he remonstrated with Densie about it — of course he came to Densie — she told him: "Why don't you talk to Sally?"

"She'd bankrupt me for a frock before we were through," he admitted.

"She is only a little girl, and she ought to mind. But since I've moved so near to downtown she cannot be kept from going there, I suppose."

"If she only marries the right man early enough," John said soberly. "Now Dean Laddbarry would never do. He's a plodder."

Densie lent herself to Dean's defense. "He's Sally's exact opposite," she insisted; "just the sort she ought to marry. He'd be her ballast. Why, I would take Dean's word before I would Sally's — and Sally treats him shamefully."

"Don't go match-making, mother," he teased. "And for heaven's sake make Kenneth stop being a mollycoddle! I won't have it!"

"How does Kenneth displease you?"

Densie used to feel as if he were striking her inside — on her heart — she had so many of these complaints. John reasoned that Densie having brought them up she was the one who should take the blame for displeasing results. He paid the bills and that was sufficient.

"Too much like a girl," John declared. "When he gets into school he'll have it taken out of him."

"If you were with him more he might improve." Densie was partly Scotch; she had that dry humor which makes even the gayest temporarily ill at ease. "I'm afraid he is hardly acquainted with his father."

The day before Harriet left for New York she and Sally came to a noteworthy battle of words which Densie overheard as she packed Harriet's trunk.

"I'm glad you are going, Harriet Plummer," Sally declared, her tempestuous self flouncing about the room in a great pretense at dusting, "for you think yourself too good to live with us. Well, when you get to New York you'll be sorry — and miss mummy — and the home. You don't think so; you're always talking of Miss Blake — Miss Blake — Miss Blake! Who wants to be a Miss Blake? She looks a fright; everyone laughs at her."

"Indeed?" said Harriet with cold insolence, trying to contain her rage. "You ignorant little thing, I really am sorry for you, Sally, for I don't know whatever will become of you if mummy should die."

"Don't you? I would never bother to write and tell you."

Sally's face was crimson and she brandished the dust cloth viciously in the air.

"You seem to have no brains," Harriet further an-



" You're deceitful and mean and selfish — I'll wager you fifteen years from now you'll be a wreck — a wreck — a wreck — "

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alyzed; " or else the brains you have are all used for vain purposes." There is nothing like youth for final decisions. " At least I can never remember your ever doing anything that was at all worth while."

" Perhaps not — but I'm not sneering at my mother and father and going to New York to turn into a fossil. You think I don't see through you — well, I do. You want to get away without any trouble and have your delightful career. I'm the one to stay home. Well, if I don't like what my mummy and my daddy do, I out and tell them so and we have a big row — but I love them hard afterward and we always kiss and make up. You hate kissing your family — you don't even like to have mummy's fingers in your neck when she fits your dresses. You're deceitful and mean and selfish, and you needn't worry as to what will become of me. I'm going to paint pictures and be a human being with—with a different dress for every dance and lots of kisses for everyone. I'll wager you fifteen years from now you'll be a wreck—a wreck—a wreck——"

Littly Sally completed her intentions by knocking over a pile of Harriet's books accidentally, at which primitive instincts were stirred in Harriet to the extent of forgetting her scholarship and the purchased railway ticket, and the two sisters became on the verge of actual combat when Densie appeared in the doorway to act as mediator.

It was a relief when Harriet left them. Densie felt more at home with Sally, selfish and unreliable though she was; she did have plenty of kisses, and in her warm-hearted way she tried to make her mother less trouble. Harriet never spared her mother. She would do a share of the work but no more, no matter what extenuating circumstances might arise. After she had done her tasks

she retired into her own world of books and thoughts and cared not what happened elsewhere. Emergencies were no concern of hers. Sally stood ready to prop up the house should it begin to fall down!

Densie never could understand Harriet's logic—which prompted the actual blackening of Miss Blake's boots and the leaving of her own for Densie to blacken!

September brought the clubs into session and Densie, unbeknown to anyone, joined the Opera Reading Club, the Progressive Thought Club, and prepared to puncture a set of brass candle shades. Sally was clamoring for candlelight at dinner. "It is quite the thing," she had said more than once.

The first clubwoman of prominence with whom Densie came into contact was Mrs. Naomi Winters, a pygmy satellite who was guilty of thin crinkly paper lined with tartan plaid and scented with lily of the valley, and who always signed herself, except to her sister-in-law, "Yours with a heart full of love."

She pounced upon Densie as a new and innocent booster for herself, and flattered her by giving her pencils to sharpen before the ballot was cast as to whether Rigoletto or Il Trovatore should be the first opera to be studied.

Densie looked at the room filled with women with a sort of awe. They were so totally different from anything she had expected; some were dowdy, some amusingly dressed, one or two quite smart — these were the leaders. Each talked of her own self and ideas, and everyone stared at her or smiled patronizingly, and it was not until the club came to a deadlock as to who should make ten dozen light tea biscuit for the first "eating meeting" of the season that Densie became an im-

portant member! Everyone crowded to lend silver candelabra or silk prayer rugs, and Mrs. Naomi Winters panted to be asked to read a paper on Sea Shells — but the biscuit — ah, that was a different matter!

Here Densie found herself timidly rising a shabby little person with serious purplish eyes and an old-time hat hiding her pretty hair and saying: "Madam President, I — I will make the ten dozen biscuit!"

There followed a soft pat-patting of hands, and Densie was immediately appointed chairman of the refreshment committee!

At the close of the meeting Mrs. Winters, who seemed to know everyone and everything about everyone, good or bad, condescended to walk a ways with Densie and initiate her into the mysteries of women's clubs.

Mrs. Winters had taught school before her marriage and was now a widow. She had aspirations to becoming vice-regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and was using the clubs as stepping stones to that end. She discreetly hinted this, saying that when the day came that she was elected to the desired post she was not going to forget the friends who had helped her — dear, no!

Then she proposed that Densie join The Forum, a very intellectual affair, meeting Saturday mornings to discuss current topics. It was only five dollars a year — luncheons and banquets extra — and she knew Densie would enjoy it.

"But I bake on Saturdays." Densie clung to the old schedule.

"You poor lamb — you must come out of the kitchen — after you've done our tea biscuit," she finished with a playful poke of the ribs. They were walking arm in arm, a customary procedure with Mrs. Winters. "You

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can buy your baked goods — try the Homestead — wonderful pineapple pies. My dear, don't drudge any more. I want to see that face of yours without a single worry line."

Then they stood on the street corner half an hour while Mrs. Winters, delighted to find a new and gullible subject, told of her excursion to the Italian lakes and of how a count kissed her hand, and when she was in London her being asked to read a most masterful paper on Women's Wrongs!

She bade Densie good-by, convinced that here was a worker, and took a passing car. Densie had to walk eight blocks, having gone out of her way, as entranced as a victim of the Pied Piper himself. She found a very hungry Sally and Kenneth and John — John who was home early for the first time in weeks — and they all demanded querulously where she had been!

When she confessed she had joined the Opera Reading Club there was a diversion of opinion. Still, it is never fair to take down a binding statement when the witness is hungry! Hurrying about to get her supper on the table Densie became confused and her head ached — was it neglecting her home? Most of the members had maids or boarded — where had she put the cold potato? — and of course she had talked a long time to Mrs. Winters. John would never have grumbled before Mrs. Winters, she could picture him bowing and smiling politely and agreeing to everything — she must make him a cup of tea. There — now things were ready! But she was not hungry and her head throbbed.

She sat at the table forgetful of her apron until unanimously reminded, and tried to make them appreciate that this was her peculiar form of recreation, as billiards and cocktails were John's, picture painting and dancing Sal-

ly's — and social-service school Harriet's. Only Kenneth said solemnly, his brown eyes very loving: "Are you tired, mummy — or did you have such a good time you don't mind?"

She turned to him with almost passionate longing to carry him off, some place where they could be together in a bit of a house with a woodshed, and where she could bake biscuits for the Opera Reading Club without ridicule or protest!

VI

Mrs. Naomi Winters called on Densie Plummer shortly, to interest her in the Poets' Club, of which she was the president. Before she left, Densie had given her the membership fee and agreed to do the correspondence work for the coming month — several sets of postals and one or two letters that Mrs. Winters graciously dictated.

The family rather frowned on Mrs. Winters; it was evident that Densie was beginning to look outside her four walls, and she left a cold supper and instructions for tea making with Sally whenever the clubs met. John was rather amused, almost pleased save as it affected his comfort — for he had a sense of justice no matter if it had been strangled of late, and he felt that Densie needed recreation.

He was so used to having Densie adore him that he was blind to anything save her direct relationship as it concerned him. She was "mother"— he never interfered with her discipline; she was just as all women should be — chiefly concerned with her home and his favorite cooking recipes. Densie adored John as mothers sometimes do their eldest sons. The relationship had gradually drifted into this. At first it had been John who adored Densie — before he was sure of her; then they ardently loved each other and supposed they would always so do. After which Densie's life narrowed because of her family and straitened circumstances, so that romance left the Little House. Unselfish ambition con-

sumed Densie, she must do everything for her family, there would be time enough for this or that after the children were grown or John had made his fortune. Her share of the hill climbing was to be housekeeper and home maker, never to bother John by nagging or complaining or intimating a lack of confidence in what he should ultimately do. John Plummer was John Plummer and the argument was closed. Even her friends, quiet home bodies like herself, marveled at the growing contrast between them — John's youthful buoyancy and Densie's tired young self.

"What do you women do at these clubs?" John asked her one of the few evenings he happened to stay at home.

"We have papers read and we hear about things — and eat — and look at each other's hats," Densie admitted, laughing.

She laid aside her pile of darning and came over to John's chair. For many years Densie had balanced herself on the chair arm while she told John or John told Densie the happenings of the day — Aunt Sally and Uncle Herbert had done likewise.

"I think it does me good, John. I know I'm not clever and that I could never read a paper on anything except cooking. But I enjoy listening and being with women who use their brains and let their hands grow white." Unconsciously she hid her small reddish ones under her apron.

"What part do you take — just audience?" John smiled up at her.

"I make the biscuit and the whipped-cream cake and the salad dressing." Densie's eyes twinkled. "By and by some newer member will heave into sight and I'll wrap her in my mantle. Then I'll be allowed to watch the umbrellas or tag round to the newspaper offices with

the notices for meetings. It has its humorous side, I admit, but so has everything else that is worth while. There are so many tired, lonesome faces, John, as if the women were not happy or felt cheated of the really big things for which they were intended. I have often watched them and forgotten the club paper — big stories lurk behind wrinkled foreheads and sunken eyes!"

"Do you never admit mere man?"

"Mere man never wishes to be admitted. Besides, we have the clubs as a revenge on mere man's bowling night and gymnasium practice, billiards and pool, cards — all sorts of nice masculine recreations. Of course, I couldn't belong to clubs and do my share if we were back in the old home — but the flat makes it easier."

"Good! I'm glad you're sensible. With Harriet away and Kenneth such a lamb, Sally is your only real problem, isn't she? We'll always stay in a flat, Densie. It is the sensible thing for families these days."

Densie slipped from the chair arm and returned to her mending. Something stirred deep within her at the mention of the other home; its very name recalled a thousand tender memories, whereas the flat brought to her mind nothing but the tumity-tum of the Sullivans' mechanical piano and the array of empty cans in the back yard.

"Yes, we must change with the times," she admitted.

Following the joining of the Poets' Club Densie affiliated herself with the Forum, also introduced by Mrs. Winters, and placed her baking order with the Homestead! But by this time Densie saw that club politics played a huge part in the club movement, and she flatly refused to make biscuit for the Forum luncheon, thereby bringing an avalanche of reproach upon her head, but winning a certain respect, which she had not done in the other clubs. The Forum was a rather advanced club,

they brought a second-rate metropolitan lecturer — at a fabulous sum, according to Densie's ideas — to read a paper on Superwomen and then be gorged with whipped cream and fruit cake at the conclusion of the general discussion. It was all crude and extremely humorous, to the lecturer; but it meant that Ibsen, Hauptmann, Pater — were no longer names to Densie, that she knew of women who triumphed over men, and that if a woman chose to start in using her brains for something else save making mince-meat or taking stains from the carpets there was no telling where she might end.

After all, the surest way to have a women's revolution is to present them with limitations; they are certain to become outraged and victorious and to return said limitations in shattered atoms with their compliments.

"Look, mummy," Kenneth said one day — it was after a hasty luncheon, because Densie wished to attend a special executive meeting of the Forum —" can I please keep him?"

Densie turned round to look. "Him" was a tawny ball of fluff, cuddled in her boy's arms; two very bright eyes looked at her in friendly fashion.

"What dog is that?" she said, unable to be stern.

"Oh, he's nobody, mother; he was just born in Skinner's back yard. But if we don't keep him they'll drown him. I want to call him Socks, because he has four white feet."

"Kenneth, dear, we can't — in a flat!"

The brown eyes darkened. "If we were at home," he protested, "he could live in the woodshed."

Densie fumbled with her veil. "Yes; but not here. Mrs. Sullivan has her Angora kitty, and they are older tenants. I'm afraid it would never do. Never mind, dear; some day you can have a dog."

"He's so little," began Kenneth, tears welling in the brown eyes.

"I know — but he wouldn't be happy cooped up in a flat; he needs a fenced-in yard for play. Take him back, Ken. I'll let you go to the next circus. You'll like that, won't you?"

The brown eyes stared in reproach. "A circus ain't but a day," he began.

"Isn't but a day, you mean."

"I can't speak nice when I'm hurt," he ended defiantly, leaving the room.

That night he said he wanted no supper, and rather silently he went to his little room.

"What's the matter with Ken?" asked Sally. Though she battled with him upon the slightest provocation, whenever he so much as shed a tear she was up in arms for his defense.

"It was a puppy I could not let him keep," Densie answered absent-mindedly. "They drowned him, I think. I'm sorry, but we never could have an animal in an upper flat."

"He might have had just one little puppy," Sally combated. "Poor Ken is cooped up, and no one seems to mind. He can't have a tent in the back yard because Mrs. Sullivan is always having her washing done; and he can't have one on the upper veranda because we all want to sit there; and he can't have one in his bedroom because it isn't big enough to change his mind; and the attic is too dirty; no matter how many times you clean your half of it, Mrs. Sullivan's half is eternally dirty and it blows over — so Ken has to fold up like a tent instead of having one."

"And what would you suggest?" said Densie a trifle irritably. She had returned from a satisfactory execu-

tive meeting, at which she was nominated for delegate to the city federation and was to wear a white ribbon badge and a pink rose on her left shoulder. " I cannot murder the lower-flat tenants."

" I just said it was a shame." Sally walked away.

" Please help me carry out the things."

Densie frowned; she hated above all things to have to insist on Sally's doing what was really her daily task. It seemed as if she had to tell her a dozen times a day to do what she was expected to do without being told.

" I want to read your letter from Harriet. If daddy isn't coming home, what's the hurry? "

Sally nonchalantly lounged into the front room. She found Harriet's letter and opened it. But before she began to read she looked at herself in the glass. This was a favorite trick. Mrs. Sullivan had asked her downstairs for cards that evening; Densie was not to know, but there was to be a young chap of twenty-four to meet Sally, and Mrs. Sullivan was to help Sally fix up, once she was safely below. Sally tossed her pretty head. Dean Laddbarry would be wild! She would have great fun telling him about it, exaggerating the young man's sudden ardor and attentions. She liked to keep Dean stepping she said; besides he was goody-good and always going to church with his grandmother or trying to earn money for something or other. Sally preferred one who went to dances with her and who spent money.

She came back to read the letter to Densie, but her mother said sharply, " Dinner is ready, Sally."

At which she flung her strong young arms about her and kissed her impetuously on the cheek. " Mummy's cross — just because I wouldn't carry in the dishes. I'll wash 'em — honestly, I will; and while you serve, I'll read this dear old prig's letter."

Smiling in spite of herself Densie began to slice the meat.

Dear People: There is really nothing to write, and yet I know you expect to hear. I have addressed this letter to Sally because it is her turn, but it is for you all. I am well and very busy. I have received 99 in psychology and 100 for my original theme on "The Causes of Infidelity Among the Italians in the United States." Miss Blake is coming down for Christmas vacation and I wish to stay here; it would save daddy some money and be an excellent thing for me. Miss Blake wants to take me to see some Ibsen plays, and I also want to meet some more people. I hope you are all well. Excuse this brief letter, but really there is nothing more to say. Lovingly,

HARRIET.

P. S.— Tell mummy not to make me any more blouses; I am going to wear pongee smocks; and if she will send me a box of Christmas goodies I shall be ever so much obliged — especially a cake!

"Well," decided Sally, folding up the letter with a flourish, "I am sure that is a very thrilling bunch of news. However, even a warm-hearted hen cannot lay a hard-boiled egg — and I suppose we ought not to expect very much from Miss Iceberg."

"Don't use slang." Densie shook her head.

"Won't we have a Christmas tree?" asked Kenneth.

"Not up here," Sally answered. "I'd be hunting pine needles the rest of my life. Let's get an artificial tree, mummy; may we?"

"If you like."

Densie was thinking of Harriet's essay on the causes of infidelity; it seemed to her a ghastly topic; Aunt Sally had educated her to believe there were certain things about which one never talked. If, unfortunately, there came an imperative and personal problem, then one's

mother and father and the minister were the proper tribunal. Harriet — not eighteen and in New York — to be refusing to come home for Christmas, though she demanded a cake, and winning an honor mark for an essay on such a subject!

"I don't want an artificial tree," protested Kenneth. "I like to smell the real one and then burn it as we used to do."

"We have no fireplace, goose-goose. Where would we burn it — in the gas range?" Sally giggled.

"Ain't we got anything real?" Kenneth savagely lapsed into ungrammatical language.

"Sh-h-h! Pass your plate, Ken. Try these ——"

"Canned stuff," he remarked cynically. "I don't want any of it."

"Mummy, I want to go downstairs to Mrs. Sullivan's; she is going to have a table of cards. Please, angel-mummy you know you want to be at peace with the world, and I'd get you all upset with my nonsense. Say yes, and I'll be home by eleven."

"School to-morrow, Sally!"

"Bother school! Say yes, and I'll even write Harriet a jolly note. If daddy was here he'd say yes."

"Yes," said Densie quietly.

She had club work to do; in secret she was actually attempting a club paper — it was as sacred and stupendous an undertaking as if she had been appointed to survey Gibraltar! Furthermore, she did not wish Sally to suspect what she was doing, she felt that the child would ridicule her.

So Densie washed the dishes herself, despite Sally's promise; and Kenneth went to bed with a book; and Sally, dressed in a crisp blue silk, tripped below to be received by Mrs. Sullivan with enthusiastic praise. Mrs.

Sullivan thought Sally had possibilities in becoming an actress, as well as great talent in her painting — Sally having painted menu cards for Mrs. Sullivan's wedding anniversary! She also considered Mrs. Plummer a little dowd who would never "hold her husband."

She helped Sally dress her lovely hair in extreme fashion and wind a black velvet band about it; she also loaned her two rings and a string of near coral and powdered her little face until she looked a veritable fashion plate.

Sally was happy. She met the young chap, a very gay dog with a sophisticated air, and quite captivated him in the way she dimpled and smiled and talked about the world and its ways in a blasé manner.

Later they had a Dutch lunch consisting of beer and salad and rye bread, and Sally drank her beer because she would not "give away her age," and tried to fight off the consequent sleepiness. Altogether it was a wonderful evening. She came upstairs to find the lights extinguished save in the hall. Densie had pinned a note to her nightgown — she no longer waited up for her family.

It read: "Dean came to see you. He wants to take you out to his grandfather's farm on Sunday. Good night and God bless Sally!"

Sally crumpled the note. After all, there was no one quite like mummy and Dean. But then, mummy and Dean were always there, waiting, whenever she was finished with other people; she would never have to worry about that! And it was larky to be able to meet young men who said nice things and never dreamed that she was only a little schoolgirl.

Densie was awake but she did not get up to see Sally. She had done her mending, though not so carefully as usual, and then had written Harriet briefly to say she

might stay in New York and that she would send her some goodies and she was a little surprised to learn the topics upon which young students were asked to write. At the Young Ladies' Seminary at Athol Springs one wrote her essays on such themes as The Happiest Day of My Life, Our Minister, or How to Overcome One's Faults!

Then she took a look at Kenneth to see if all was well and came to her old-fashioned desk to begin writing. As she wrote she heard the voices below, laughing over their card game, and she paused to wonder whether it had been right to allow Sally to go alone. But had she dared suggest a chaperon she would have been laughed at and defied — things were all so different!

She dismissed her fears and continued writing. Dean Laddbarry had come in to see Sally, and at first Densie suggested he go downstairs and see her, but he said he would not bother, it would upset the "party." He did not add he had caught a glimpse of Sally before he came upstairs, and heartily disapproved.

"What are your hopes and fears, Dean?" Densie asked, drawing a paper over her writing.

"I'm bound for the West as soon as I'm through school. I want to do something that's outdoors." He laughed at his restless energy. "I don't believe I could stand too much civilization. I'm not like Sally."

His face sobered. Young as he was, Dean had given away his heart for all time.

"Why not a ranch?" Densie began to feel enthusiastic; she liked having Dean's coming to talk things over with her. "You're so young and filled with promise, you're bound to do something worth while."

"I won't stay here, that's a certainty. Everything is getting a mad scramble. Why, it won't be long, Mrs.

Plummer, before the old firms will be crowded to the wall."

He paused, realizing he had spoken rashly.

"I suppose — they have suffered now because they will not change their methods."

"You go into a modern drug store and you see everything but drugs — artificial corsages, dolls, candy, magazines, tennis rackets, goldfish; and way, way back is a little spot labeled 'Prescriptions.' It's the same with a book store. Department stores gobble them up. The old-time boot stores have gone as well ——"

"And tea-and-coffee stores," Densie laughed.

Dean flushed. "I hope not — if Plummer & Plummer stopped business we'd all take milk to drink! That old house stands for everything that is square. My grandfather remembers when Mr. Herbert Plummer's father founded it, how he went to the Orient and it took him months to complete arrangements. He says there isn't a finer firm in the world."

"Yet they don't seem to prosper any more. Why, Dean! Here I am telling you my troubles. Don't worry, dear boy; we're all right for a while. I'm not a good substitute for Sally, but I can appeal to your stomach if not your heart. How about cake?"

"That special cake — the sort you made back at the old house?"

"The same, the first we've had in weeks. I'm growing lazy."

She rose and he followed her into the kitchen. It seemed so natural to have Dean —"just a good-looking thing," as Sally said — sitting at the table to munch his cake and confide his plans, asking about Harriet and shaking his head over the description of the way Sally was painting her hats to match her dresses until every-

ne thought she possessed at least a dozen — and saying iat his family wanted to take Kenneth out on the farm or a holiday next summer.

After he left, kissing her unashamedly, according to ustom, the club paper seemed flat and rather stale, and he felt she would better not attempt it. She was angry .t herself for the change in attitude, and as she tried to vhip back the zest for it she kept recalling the two unnended holes in Kenneth's play suit and the fact that ihe had yielded to an oiled mop for cleaning instead of getting right down on her hands and knees and giving :he floor a " good wash."

So she went to bed, divided between loyalty to the old and seeking her salvation in the new; and long after Sally was asleep John came home with the news that he had decided to buy some more mining stock — he must do something or else the firm would fail.

" By the way, Densie, my clothes are in tatters," he complained. " Don't you ever get the time to mend any more? "

" I will to-morrow," she promised.

After all, it takes a great deal of dodging to evade cares successfully.

VII

Harriet's summer vacation was spent, perforce, with her family. Everyone dreaded it except Kenneth and John. John really welcomed his oldest child, and he kept thinking that Harriet should have been the boy, she had such a dignified way with her that could manage anyone or anything. It was a shame her name was not authentically Harry.

Kenneth welcomed her because it meant that Harriet refused to share Sally's room, and as they had only three bedrooms it would be Kenneth's joyful lot to accept Dean's invitation for the country. For eight weeks he would revel in green fields, with everything in the living beastie line for which he had craved during the past year.

"He's only askin' me because he likes Sally," he told his mother with a flash of wisdom; "but I don't care — I'm gettin' there! I won't have to hear Sally and Harriet fight and have to stay off the street because of the big boys."

So they packed his small trunk and sent him on his way rejoicing, with Dean trying to coax Sally into joining them for a week.

"You know I hate the country," she said pettishly. "I'm just getting acquainted with nice people." There had been several little parties at Mrs. Sullivan's at which Sally had been a guest.

"There are roses and buggy rides and picnics in the woods," he said wistfully. "You know you'd like it after you got there."

She shook her head. "No, thank you. Take Ken;

he's sure to java-and-mocha better than I would. I can't bear to be sunburnt, and I loathe pigs!"

"You needn't look at 'em, Sally, dear."

"You'd be in horrid working things, and there's the smell of the barns — ugh, I wouldn't stand it!"

So she sent him away with her brother, a grain of consolation in the fact that at least he was making inroads into his beloved's family.

Harriet arrived, very pale and thin and reserved toward everyone and everything. She considered the Sullivans a vulgar sort, and her mother was amusing in her abortive attempts at club life; "mental pap" she called their courses of study. Her father looked splendid and she did not blame him for staying away a good share of the time. It was impossible to be composed in a crowded upper flat in which a hair wreath and a Gibson girl glared at each other, and Sally's popular songs and Densie's hymnal sat side by side on the piano rack. When Sally pertinently made a little footstool out of an old shoulder organ which one of Densie's great uncles, a circuit rider, used to carry on his back from town to town, and Densie said it was a sacrilege, Harriet ridiculed both of them alike.

It was impossible to know Harriet; Densie made several attempts. She took her to a basket picnic of the Forum, but was sorry she had done so, for the girl was patronizing to her mother's friends and stated radical views in startling fashion; even Mrs. Naomi Winters admitted that here was a young person who might be clever, but was decidedly unconventional.

Then Densie tried to win her by old-time cooking — the fussy expensive dishes she had not made in more than a year, but Harriet waved them aside. She ate no meat, she loathed a gourmand — this with a little smile di-

rected in Sally's pathway, Sally returning it with a hope-to-die face — and she followed the example of some of her beloved teachers — a biscuit-and-lettuce-and-prune sort of dietary. Even Miss Blake had become a bit ultra, according to Harriet, though she still valued her opinion. But Miss Blake was provincial! Harriet had created an entirely new set of values, she explained.

When Densie timidly mentioned the essay on the causes of infidelity Harriet without a blush, and without any real understanding, answered in such concise and startling terms that Densie felt the Forum, the Poets' Club and the rest were naught but mental kindergartens.

Harriet and Sally did not openly disagree — Sally would have been delighted, but Harriet refused. They were "estranged," each with her own interests — Sally her friends and pretty frocks, her daubs of paintings, her lovable nonsense; whereas Harriet, shabby but content in a crumpled linen frock, would steal to her room and spend the day poring over some revolutionary handbook or making notations for future reference about a moth-eaten and long-ago-forgotten civilization of which she had just read.

She chose a fair portion of the work — never in the kitchen, but a scornful arranging of the rooms; and this she did regardless of the day. One day Sally would attempt cooking dinner, washing dishes and cleaning the floors, and for a week afterward refuse even to dust her own dressing table.

Harriet would not meet Sally's friends. "I don't say but what Sally has a right to develop in her own way; she is beautiful but quite a fool, mother, and I can never be intimate with her."

"Don't grow away from us altogether, will you?" Densie had urged. "You seem so grown up and such a

stranger — I dread to think of what four more years will bring."

Harriet smiled.

"I don't quite understand what you intend doing," Densie added. "Of course, I believe in and urge charity work — your Aunt Sally was the soul of charity. Many's the time she has rescued some poor waif or abused animal or set a family on its feet — but it doesn't seem as if you were going to be like her."

"I never expect to have personal contact with the poor," Harriet explained; "that is apart from my work. Statistics are what I am studying, tabulating the various things. I really can't explain it, mother, but when I go back I'll send you reading matter, and then perhaps you can see. I hope to write original essays after a few years. As soon as I am through school I shall be appointed to some bureau in New York. If I can I shall spend all my vacations abroad — I can earn extra money coaching — because I must study penal institutions. The Swiss homes for women criminals are vastly superior to ours. Some of the murderesses, particularly those who killed from a jealous motive, are most interesting. And the drunkards and prostitutes are entirely apart ——"

"My dear little child"— Densie was aghast —"you must not hear of such things or see such people! I shall talk with your father to-night!"

"It is merely analyzing them," the girl persisted. "Don't worry, mother, I'm not at all contaminated. Besides, I intend to do such work always. And now I want to tell you about clothes. I need so very few and of such a different sort from Sally that I prefer to take my money and buy them in New York. Then I can get just what I want — a mannish tweed suit and starched waists and smocks for Sunday high teas."

"Have you been going to church?"

"Have you?"

Densie flushed. "I'm ashamed to say not regularly; Sunday seems to be the one day in which to get caught up with odds and ends — not right, I know, and I intend it shall be different. But you, dearie, ought to go — why, even Sally does."

"Because she has good hats and decent-looking feet," Harriet retorted; "but for myself, I shall never go."

"You mean you do not believe in God!"

Densie stood up in her excitement.

"I believe in a Force — but not the cut-and-dried theology that you taught me. I believe the Deity is kindly, but not omnipotent — and I am not interested in religion half so much as in other things. If I were I dare say I might formulate a certain creed or set of ethics — the pagan philosophies interest me far more."

Densie was silent from horrified disapproval. Finally she said, "And how are you to reach the poor unless you tell them of the Greatest Poor Man of all, born in a manger?"

"There are plenty who will do that and be very happy — the sort who nag the Deity for pleasant weather on the day of church lawn fêtes and fuss over the souls of the unwashed, tying blue ribbons on them, I dare say."

"Your flippancy is not pleasing, Harriet."

"It is honesty. We must be honest, mother. I cannot tell some pleasing little untruth just because it would make you happy."

"What sort of women teach you — and men — and what sort of girls do you know?"

"A very decent sort," she answered in clipped modern

fashion; "nice old things — and they've been bully to me."

"And in this great charity work of yours, who is to give old men and old women hot soups and flannels, and comfort children and take care of foundlings? Someone has to do that, Harriet, and we were always taught that to give of oneself was the greatest charity of all."

"I don't know about that side of the work. We were talking of clothes and I was saying that one good suit was all I needed ——"

"But these high teas?" Densie was not to be put off. "Where are they and what do you do at them?"

"A lot of us get together and talk over knotty problems; we row a good deal, I admit, but it's corking fun. We don't have much tea because nearly everyone smokes and drinks black coffee — tea is rather in the discard."

"Smoke! Do you know what your father would say to this?"

"Daddy won't say anything — he's no right. He smokes. Besides, everyone has the right to develop along her own peculiar bent."

"Charity workers smoking! Is that a good example to set a street child?"

Harriet laughed. "They don't go about coloring a meerschaum, mummy. You see you can't understand. These women are advanced, liberated women, and they are true to themselves, scorning any conventions. Is smoking any worse than eating too much candy, the way Sally does?"

Densie came very close to her oldest child as she asked fearfully, "Have — have you ever smoked?"

"A little. Don't like it — that's the only reason I don't. Did you say the underwear I brought home was

on its last round? Well, I'll buy new in New Yc You can give it to Sally."

Densie felt as if the door had been pushed shut ; locked and she stood without, unwelcomed. For remainder of the vacation she did not try to approach daughter with any save trivial detail. Nor did she her husband about the high teas. Something about H riet warned her that interference would breed open ; lasting rebellion.

VIII

With Harriet's departure for her second year in New York and Kenneth's joyous return from his holiday, Densie took up her club work for the winter, only to be halted by a new and perplexing problem.

The opening of the high school was on a Tuesday. Arrayed in some fluffy dress Sally had pranced out of the house in high spirit. She had just passed her seventeenth birthday — and Harriet her nineteenth — and she had but one more year before graduation.

"How was school?" Densie had asked at the dinner table.

"All right," Sally said vaguely; then she began to ask her father nonsensical questions.

"And what studies will you have?" Densie continued patiently.

"Oh — awful old stuff! Don't remind me of it. Daddy, may I go to the billiard tournament with you? Lots of girls go with their fathers."

"But I shall play in it — how can I take you?"

Sally looked at her mother. She was thinking how shabby Densie would seem in the fashionable hotel parlor. So she said, "I could be with Mrs. Sullivan, for she is going too."

"John," Densie protested.

"Well, mummy, what's the harm if she likes? I guess I can keep an eye on Sally and win the cup besides," he answered indulgently, because he liked to have Sally about; she was so attractive that in a certain sense she took the place of having an attractive wife.

Densie dropped the subject. And after the tournament — at which John did win the cup and Sally carried it about in high glee, every member of the club telling John that his daughter was a winner as well — the secret about high school was disclosed. Sally had not even registered at high school. One of her former teachers had asked Maude Hatton and Lucy Parks about her, and the spinsters coming over for their Sunday night supper were all anxiety lest Sally was ill and they had not been told.

Densie was nonplused. Sally had gone out for the evening. She disliked the old friends, they gave her the fidgets, so she would not be back in time to make any explanation in their presence. John worried down his supper, the news alarming him. It was unlike Sally, and he resented the fact of her deception's coming through the "old girls" who so utterly bored him. It seemed to John that Densie could have found a way of dropping them, as she had many of the old things.

He took them home, a tedious bit of chivalry which he was still "led into," as he used to declare, and listened to their ladylike chirpings about Sally's "naughtiness" and "what could the child be doing?" They had been chirping unpleasant little things all evening. Even Densie admitted that as east is east and west is west, so old is old and new is new; and when they stared in horror at a ballet-girl calendar Sally was making for her father's office, and said that the black-walnut chairs in the kitchen were better than the reed ones on the porch, and that being on the farm had saved Kenneth's health — he was growing like a potato sprout in the flat; and they wondered if Densie wanted any pieces for a quilt; they would not only give her some, but come over to help make it — Densie felt as if one half of her was living among ghosts

and the other half among flesh-and-blood persons who disagreed with everything she did or said.

The only modern thing they told her was when Lucy Parks was helping Maude Hatton readjust her rusty black cape — Densie remembered that cape from the days of Kenneth's babyhood.

"I don't believe you've had a new dress in an age, Densie," she said, looking over her spectacles. "Come, come, that won't do! Don't let Miss Harriet run off with all your books and Miss Sally with all your finery. You're young too."

After they left and Densie was waiting for John's return so they could discuss Sally's strange action, she began to think of the trim fall suits the club members had displayed and lovely felt hats with white wings or shining buckles. She had been unconscious of her own appearance. It had never seemed to matter. She had been so busy with her home and with trying to understand her family and provide for their needs and to become intellectually rejuvenated herself that the mere need of clothes had not entered her bewildered little brain.

She rose and opened the wardrobe door to look at her gowns. They were all of excellent material, but home-made and remade and dyed and cut over — and her hat was bought the year Kenneth started kindergarten, and then at a cheap store because John had had a bad loss. She had one pair of white-kid gloves, but her others were silk and mended and yellowed. She had not become initiated into the mysteries of smart corseting — her stays were lax, old-style things, explanation of her aging figure; and she wore shoes built for comfort and not style, Sally said. In fact, Densie was hopelessly shabby. She wondered how much clothes made the woman, if they made the man, as John had declared. She wondered how she

would look dressed as the president of the Forum was at a previous reception — in a rosy lilac silk like a wild dove's breast, caught here and there with silvery lace and a collar of pearls and a hat aigretted to the last inch of the brim. She had worn her old black silk with a tatting collar, but it had not mattered, since she had washed the silverware and had been busy serving out portions of salad and ice cream. She wore a big apron, she remembered, so that no one had seen her gown.

Then she reproached herself for wandering from the important topic of Sally's truancy. She was not yet poised — her mind was still a single-compartment affair in which she jumbled up everything regardless of coherence or imperativeness.

John returned, walking in with a gloomy air and saying sharply: "So you've brought your daughter up to lie?"

He really did not mean the words just as they sounded, but Densie's chin quivered.

"How have you brought your daughter up?" she demanded.

"I haven't had time — it has been your job. It's a fine thing if a man has to hear through two tattling old women that his daughter has been skipping school and never saying why. I would not have believed it of Sally."

"Nor I."

"It might as well be in the newspaper — that pair will chortle over it the rest of their days. They don't like me, Densie, because I haven't flowing mudguard whiskers and a waistcoat like Sam Hippler's and I don't sit and bewail the automobile menace, and so on, and so forth. Well, I suppose Sally has some sort of a story cooked up for us. The little idiot — she must have

known it could not go on very long before it would be found out!"

"Let us wait and see what she has to say," pleaded Densie.

"If you hadn't been so occupied with clubs all last year"— John tossed off his coat and picked up a house jacket —"you might have seen what was happening to Sally."

"I did not neglect my house," she began. "I must have some outside interest. Your interests are outside your home. You belong to clubs — drinking clubs," she added.

"That is for business. It is expected of me."

"It is for business with me too. My housework demands an antidote; I am shabby and a drudge even now — but I'm doing my best to rise above it."

"Oh, are you discontented?" he asked sharply.

"Only with myself. I feel I have not made a success of marriage. I seem to have lost the closeness with all of you ——"

John looked at her intently. Something cast a blur over the tired little woman, and in her place he saw the old lovely Densie in her going-away gown of dove-colored broadcloth, the fussy hat, the white chenille face veil. He was a young bridegroom again flushed with rosy dreams!

He put his arms round her. "Never mind, Densie, I love you," he told her, to her amazement; "but nowadays we don't have time for lovemaking like Aunt Sally and Uncle Herbert used to have." He kissed her more tenderly than he had for months.

"John, growing old together ought to be the best of all. Let us find time for it," she begged.

He was about to answer when Sally bounded in the

door, her party cape slipping off her plump pink shoulders and her white-lace frock making her seem like a figurine escape from a drawing-room cabinet.

"Why, daddy — kissing mummy — you old barbarians! Well? What have you to say for yourselves — eh?" She shook a finger at them.

John spoke first. "Why have you not told us you were not going to school?" His voice was excited and overloud.

Dęnsie tried to be more gentle. "If you were ill, Sally, you should have told me."

"She has not been ill — look at her!" Her father pointed an accusing finger.

"I was going to tell you," answered Sally easily, not at all alarmed, "but I hadn't found an opportune time — when you were both home and both in a good humor! Ho-hum, what's to pay whether I go to high school or not?" She swung airily into the bedroom to throw off her wraps and return. "All it means, father, is that I want to take painting lessons and devote my whole time to it. I can't go to school and paint too — can I?" She smiled her prettiest.

"Why did you deceive us?"

"I didn't — exactly. I've been going to a studio on Elm Street. I'm competing for a prize. The prize is ten free lessons from Miss Boechat. I had to work very hard too. I just wanted to wait to tell you until I had won the prize. Is that so terrible? You let Harriet go to New York to study what she wished — I'm sure I ought to have the same right."

"Harriet graduated with the highest honors ——"

"I haven't that sort of brains. I want to paint pretty useless things," Sally said honestly, "and drum a little on the piano and make oodles of clothes and hats and

just stay at home. Daddy, say I don't have to go back to school — I just can't! I'm almost sure to win the prize; and if I do I think I have the right to stop school and study art."

John hesitated, looking sideways at Densie.

"But Sally, dear, an artist has a very hard life unless he has great commercial ability as well. Even geniuses starve ——"

"Oh, this is just until I am married." Sally dimpled prettily. "I shan't be on your hands long. I want to have something to do between now and twenty. At twenty I'm sure to have a lovely, lovely husband!"

John smiled in spite of himself. "Have you any idea who he is to be, my dear?"

"Oh, no, that's the fun — I want to be surprised."

Densie shook her head. "I think someone named Sally Plummer ought to make herself go back to school, graduate properly and then we shall see."

"Come, Sally, a new bonnet if you do," offered her father.

Sally shook her head. "No, no, no!" she said with a flash of temper. "I tell you I will not study books any more! I cannot sit still and listen to homely old teachers tell about things dead and gone for years. I can't sing the silly little songs like a child, and drill like a fireman, and then debate on some awful subject that you have to learn how to pronounce. I'm growing up — I'm older than Harriet was — in my thoughts. I won't be a child at school. I want to learn how to earn my own living — just until I'm twenty."

Without any warning she threw herself across the divan and began to sob.

"You tend to her."

John disappeared through the first doorway.

Densie knelt beside Sally, to catch murmurs about no school — married at twenty — hate books — love art — won't — won't — run away — be chorus girl — yes, she could —someone told her so — oh, someone — must she publish a list of her friends? — won't — won't — won't!

After the hysteria was expended Densie helped her to bed. Then the tragic side of neurotic youth was uppermost. It should have caused Densie to smile, but she took it seriously. She had never been a victim to such nerves as Sally's.

For Sally in her little white gown, the red-gold hair in thick plaits, stood dramatically in the doorway and said that she would take her life if they forced her to go back to school; they would find her dead the day they tried to send her, and if they sent her to a convent she would starve herself to death, ending with an altogether unheard-of and unnecessary oath to the effect that she would keep this pledge.

Densie was horrified. She thought with quick relief of steady, sane Harriet, as cold as a snow-capped mountain, but as reliable. This tempestuous, beautiful child, slightly mad because her own will was crossed, was far more baffling than her sister.

"Sally darling, are you ill? Come here, let me feel your forehead."

"Will you promise?" demanded Sally sullenly.

"Don't make me promise now — wait until to-morrow."

At which Sally began the crying all over again, and after another nerve-racking hour Densie had weakly promised that Sally need not go back to school, but might continue her painting until she married the "lovely husband" at twenty.

When she told John he seemed relieved it was no worse.

"You didn't use to have such scenes. What ailed the child?" he asked Densie.

"No, children are different nowadays. They must do what they want to do. I am disappointed at her not finishing school; it isn't proper. I should not have forced her beyond that, but high school was to be expected of all our children."

"Well, we've Harriet for a bluestocking and Sally for a butterfly — so we must be satisfied. With Sally's face she'll have plenty of chances to marry, and I've no doubt the little villain will win the painting prize."

"What do you think Kenneth will be?"

"I couldn't say. A ladies' hatter from the way he seems afraid to fight the boys," John answered shortly.

He had never become friends with his son. Instinctively the boy stayed away from him. If his father found him absorbed with a story or fondling some stray dog or trying to cut fanciful patterns from colored papers he sent him roughly outdoors — to "find out how to be a boy," he would insist. He wanted him to be manly, as he called it. He disliked the bookish habit, the hours spent by himself in some queer play. He even disliked his physical appearance, though he would hardly admit this to himself. "A pretty young lady," he called him to Densie, who winced under the criticism.

Only Densie and her son knew the happiness they found in each other. She even took him to club meetings, where he would sit, grave as an owl, watching his mother's slightest gesture or listening eagerly when her sweet little voice answered "Present" at roll call. Evenings when they were alone they read stories or made up even

better stories which ended entirely to their peace of mind; they indulged in simple games or drew cartoons, and Densie would play on the piano — something she never dared do before the others. When she had, Harriet would leave the room, John would demand something lively, and Sally openly ridicule until she could gain possession of the pianoforte and dash off into ragtime. But Kenneth loved hymn tunes and the old melodies, and they would sing, these two, when their spirits were completely restored from family pressure, and then Densie would be prevailed upon to make taffy or white-honey candy, and the evening would end in riotous dissipation. But this was never told the others; they understood that it was wiser not, since nothing blights pleasure so much as ridicule.

IX

The next morning Sally, rather white-faced and hollow-eyed after her brainstorm, listened to Densie's gentle admonition about her studying art; and also to the fact that her mother would not be home at noon and she must get a cold lunch for Kenneth and herself — one of the clubs was having a luncheon.

"I am glad you and father appreciate my viewpoint," Sally said stiffly as Densie finished. "When I am married I shall repay you for all my expenses!"

Densie repressed a smile.

Sally set about the morning's work, with the result that Kenneth came home to an empty house at noon, foraged bravely for his lunch, leaving a sticky trail of maple sirup across the kitchen floor. It was not Sally's intention to slack. But she had had a fascinating morning at the studio. Miss Boechat liked Sally because she was bright and pretty, and she had told the girl untruths as to her possibilities. She knew Sally's father was a reliable business man, and steady pupils were scarce. So at the conclusion of the morning she announced that Sally Plummer had won the prize of ten painting lessons, and Sally, gazing fondly at her foolish little picture of two miniature deer in a huge park overhung with fat green trees, told herself with a solemn seriousness that art was to be her lifework as statistics were Harriet's, and that the future bridegroom must be a world-famous artist who would bow before her superior talent and beg her hand in wedlock.

She told Miss Boechat her father would allow her to

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study regularly, at which Miss Boechat kissed her rapturously and said she was going to make her father prouder than he ever imagined. By this time it was noon and Sally regretfully tore herself away from the fascinating semi-Bohemian studio where Miss Boechat worked and lived. She was a mysterious Miss Boechat, who had seen much sadness, she told Sally. She was addicted to perfumes and cosmetics, and dressed in an old-rose mandarin coat that made Sally's eyes sparkle with approval. There were seven men who wished to marry her, she also confided to her prize pupil; and Sally had listened eagerly to the stories concerning each and Miss Boechat's stern refusal to give up her art. It was a wonderful way to live, Sally believed, in a big studio with a fireplace and tapestries and rugs and all manner of pictures, busts and modeling clay. Behind a gorgeous green-silk screen was an eternally unmade cot bed, some disreputable cooking materials and a line of Miss Boechat's washing. This was her "home"— but no one ever saw that or the piles of dust that she methodically swept under the cot bed and left there until she had a general cleaning. Sally planned to have a similar studio and live like Miss Boechat and wear just such a rose mandarin coat and black-satin skirt and have her hair piled high on her head and crowned by a carved comb. Life would be very beautiful then — with studio teas for admiring patrons and her pupils adoring her and bringing her flowers and candy and trinkets, and seven strong serious-minded men of fame and wealth all begging for her hand.

She wandered along in this reverie until she unexpectedly met Dean Laddbarry, who was taking a post-graduate course at the high school.

"Why, Sally," he said happily; "if this isn't luck! For heaven's sake, where have you been? If you hadn't

told me I must not come I'd have been over ages ago. Where are you bound for?" He tucked her arm through his with a possessive air.

Sally demurred. "Take me to luncheon, Dean," she said with the air of a woman of the world. "I've something important to tell you."

Dean halted. "Wait till I see how much I've got on me. You know I'm saving up, Sally, and those last flowers you wanted came pretty high ——"

"How horrid to stand and count money!" Sally stamped her foot. "Most of the men I know"— she had in imagination adopted the seven suitors of Miss Boechat —"have rolls of money, just rolls of it! And they never consider the price of anything — if I wish it."

"Maybe they don't, but I have to," he answered with the curtness of nineteen years. "Here's a dollar and a half — can you eat on that?"

"In some tea room; I wanted to do one of the hotels."

Sally tossed her head and walked on, Dean following.

"With whom did you ever go to a hotel?" he demanded. "I bet your mother didn't know. Sally Plummer, you're only a kid, and you better stay away from them. I know what I'm talking about too."

"I go to hotels with my friends," Sally insisted, imagination becoming reality. "Here is this Sisters Three place — shall we try it?"

"Will your mother mind — shall we phone?"

"She isn't home and Ken can get something for himself."

So they turned into a tea room and sought a secluded table. Sally was really ashamed of Dean's clothes, the everyday blue-serge clothes of a nineteen-year-old boy who was going to amount to something. The careless way that the blue tie was worn, the soft gray shirt, the

dusty felt hat, the lack of gloves and the tramping boots — all told their story. Dean's ambition was to own something big and out of doors where he could expend his endless energy yet use his brains as well. He was planning to go to the oil country in Wyoming as soon as it was possible.

"Well, what about it, Sally?" He smiled at her, thinking she was the most beautiful girl that had ever existed.

"I'm going to study art, Dean. I've won a prize at Miss Boechat's school and father says I needn't go back to high school. Isn't that wonderful? I shall study abroad and live there for some time," she supplemented.

"Aren't you going to graduate?"

"How silly to waste the time. You see I have a great deal of talent — and I simply have to paint. Miss Boechat said it was born in me."

"Oh, well, when are you figuring on going abroad?"

"In a year or so." Sally was delighted with Dean's discomfiture.

"You couldn't go alone, Sally, you're so young."

"But an art student is different. I may marry a foreigner and never return. I think it might be more congenial. American women have to do such a lot of housework — even nice men like father don't spare their wives. Look at poor mummy; she used to be beautiful and have pretty clothes and everything — when she was at The Evergreens. Then she married father and she has worked ever since. I don't want to be like mummy."

"Your mother has done her part," said Dean soberly before attacking a sandwich.

"I'm going to choose a different part. Of course, if I marry a foreigner, I'll never see you again — but I wish you all the success in the world."

"You better make that good-by a little later."

"Fate is a queer force — we may not see each other much longer!"

Dean's eyebrows drew together in a straight line. "If you knew how much I liked you," he said forcibly; "but I think you do — and when I make my share of money you're going to marry me."

Sally giggled excitedly. "Silly boy — as if I would! Why, Dean dear, I want an artist for a husband; someone who understands."

Dean's common sense came to the rescue. "We neither one ought to be talking about such things. I want to tell you that you are making a whale of a mistake by stopping school and letting that woman get you all excited about art. It may be so and it may not be so. I know you're bright, Sally, and all that — but you can't tell yet. If you were to stay with your mother and learn the things she knows it might be a lot better later on."

"Don't you speak to me for a week!" Sally retorted. "Why, I never heard of any gentleman's telling a lady any such things!"

"I'm not a gentleman and you are not a lady." He reached his tanned hand across the table. "I always liked you and you liked me — way deep — but you just won't admit it. Come on, 'fess up — you do like me?"

"I did until you insulted me," she said icily, and despite his protests she refused to relent and let him escort her home. He left her on the corner and went his way, minus his money and his peace of mind. It seemed to him that her plans must all be checked, and he wondered if Densie Plummer would not take a firm hand in the so doing.

Returning from the club luncheon Densie met Dean, so he walked home with Sally's mother if not with Sally.

Densie was tired and she had a large bundle; she had loaned half her silverware to adorn the table and had washed all of the dishes. It occurred to her that some of the women with machines might have offered to take her home; it was the least they could do after devouring her salad dressing and eating her cake! It was slowly impressing itself on Densie that even nice people will use you if they can, and that she had not emancipated herself from the drudgery. She smiled with relief as Dean shouldered the bundle.

He told her about meeting Sally and what she had said. Densie frowned.

"I should have been there to get Kenneth's lunch — but I thought Sally would go home, as she was told. Don't pay any attention to her, Dean. She is just living in a fairy tale all her own. I cannot force her to go to school; her father says she was born to be a butterfly. I was engaged when I was seventeen."

"She says she wants to marry a foreigner," grieved Dean in boy fashion. It was a strange relief to tell his sorrows to the mother of the girl he adored.

"Little goose! Wait a few years. Don't give up hope! Get your ranch or your gold mine and plug away. You'll win Sally over the crowned heads of Europe." Densie laughed up at the tall boy, who was staring mood ily into the distance.

"Won't you come in?" she asked as they reached the flat.

"Sally said I couldn't — for a week," he answered stoically.

"Oh, these children!" Densie patted him on the shoulder and came up the steps, noticing that Mrs. Sullivan had not cleaned as was her turn to do, and that she,

Densie, must do so before the place was an utter disgrace. This turn and turn about arrangement in flats is not always satisfactory. It had been Densie who had mopped the porch faithfully and seen to the lawn and various other details while Mrs. Sullivan had seen to her summer wardrobe and the whiteness of her hands.

That winter and spring Sally's lessons with Miss Boechat were far-reaching in their effects. It was not long before she was taking design and modeling work as well. This meant she must be away all day and that she lunched downtown. Sometimes it was with her father or with Miss Boechat, and other times, unbeknownst to Densie, it was with art students, older men and women, sophisticated idlers, who told her many new and startling things. Sally changed during the spring of 1903 into a more beautiful Sally than before, but utterly useless save for her "art"— coming home unwillingly at night to dawdle about, making a pretense of doing housework, but flying in relief to her room to rig up some irresistible costume out of odds and ends.

There was no denying her knack for so doing or in dressing her hair a dozen different ways or dreaming wild possibilities — those unhealthy dreams of adolescent girlhood — always concerning impossible triumphs and achievements, in which she was the adored heroine and victor of all the world; married happily and adored; and then having unhappiness steal in, some interesting tragedy in which she played a noble and spectacular part; then a period of renunciation, during which she should paint some great masterpiece — a Madonna, very likely, and it would be purchased by a nobleman. He would seek out the artist, woo her ardently, marry her, take her off in a whirl of excitement to his castle —— And on and

on these day dreams would extend, with Sally always playing the talented, beautiful, flawless woman who ruled by a smile or a nod of her red-gold head.

In her imagination she clothed herself in ermine, sables, velvet, brocaded satins, jewels worth a king's ransom; she drove imported French motors, she became a racing champion, a champion mountain climber, a champion swimmer — everything that the world did Sally did and excelled in doing, according to her dreams. She even evolved a set of fictitious characters with whom she lived and who dulled the realities of the crowded modern little flat, the silent brother-child, the tired mother trying to become free of care, and a handsome father who was seldom home! As Harriet put her soul into her work so Sally put hers into dreams. It was not an uncommon experience, youth must always pass through a period of exaggeration in some form, and better that it was in dreams safe within her home than in the world without.

These imaginary characters were interesting. They consisted of an extremely rich old grandfather who adored her and showered her with luxury; a young handsome man, Jack, who wished to marry her — but he was poor! Then there was a wealthy elderly gentleman, Mr. Bryan Montague, a despised suitor but a persistent one, who sent her ten pounds of chocolates and a few dozen orchids, in which black-pearl trifles were concealed, two or three times each week! Besides these Sally had conceived of a haughty duchess spending the winter on the Riviera — they were all on the Riviera in fact — and her son, Duke de Chaumont, an artistic genius, cousin to all the royal families in Europe! After very thrilling escapades with each, and her tender heart pitying poor Jack and being gentle but firm with Mr. Montague, her duke says he will play pirate and capture her, and so they are married

only to fall into the hands of real pirates while on their wedding journey, and Sally, the fair young duchess now, being dragged off to a Turkish harem and besieged by the young handsome sultan to rule over the land — her wonderful poise and bravery — her outwitting him, her escape — and so on.

It was little wonder Sally refused to darn her stockings or to eat enough breakfast and would not wear proper winter clothing, to Densie's anxiety, but went forth clad in shimmery chiffon waists showing her full white neck, and dancing pumps with white spats to attract attention, a gold-lace hat, suitable for best, Densie considered, and white chamois gloves scented with triple wild rose.

Densie did not suspect this day dreaming, but she disapproved of Sally's frittering away time and strength, her endless beaus — older men than Densie liked, who seemed ill at ease in the flat, but who Sally declared were perfectly ripping at the various studio dances.

Once Densie plucked up courage to go to Miss Boechat and ask if she did not think Sally merely had a great liking for art and the rather indolent life it incurred rather than sufficient talent to persevere unto the heights. She disapproved of Miss Boechat, whom she found in a bizarre, sophisticated negligee — the sort that is not quite nice for an unmarried woman to possess — and smoking a cigarette.

Scenting the loss of a pupil Miss Boechat was vehement in superlative praise. Sally was a budding genius, a beautiful creature; kindly allow her to develop as she would. Miss Boechat adored her as her own child — and she felt that Sally was not quite happy in her home; too conventional, perhaps?

All the time her hard bright eyes stared at Densie's shabby bonnet and mended glove tips; and Densie, dis-

comfited by the arrival of some pupils, went away realizing that she could not interfere with Sally's life any more than she could with Harriet's career.

She spent a happy evening with Kenneth — Sally was at a dance — playing dominoes and popping corn and talking about "when mummy is old and Kenneth is grown up and he buys her a little country house and comes to see her!" They, too, were day dreaming.

Harriet's letters grew more brief and her printed accounts of her work more numerous. She was doing remarkably well, and when the vacation came she stayed on in New York as assistant secretary to one of the principals, thereby earning her way and saving her father, who rejoiced at the good fortune.

Densie did not miss Harriet — it was a numbed emotion she had for her. Besides, she was so sure of Harriet in certain ways. She was not sure about Sally; she heard rumors that Sally went to hotels with men, and to dances where she had strange partners; and she shielded these rumors from her husband because she knew he would only splutter and blame her, naturally; and it would increase Sally's obstinacy.

She had never become neighborly with the Sullivans, and the old friends had stopped coming to see her. She lived so far away from them, and besides, when they came it was often evident they were not wanted. Lucy Parks and Maude Hatton still came Sundays, but Sam Hippler waited for a special invitation, which was as seldom as was decent, John declared.

If she had not had club interests she would have been very lonely; even being fag for the clubs was a change, though it was far from what she had anticipated. She joined an English Reading Club because they served no refreshments and she saw a loophole from cooking and

washing dishes. But the reading class devoted half their time to current topics, and Densie was detailed with scissors and paste pot to cut out the things of interest and get them in shape for discussion, and she also was elected corresponding secretary, because she wrote such a "dear little hand," and because no one else wanted the task of addressing numerous envelopes and licking the postage stamps. Kenneth sealed and stamped the envelopes. He was quite happy when Densie would clear off a corner of the old secretary and let him work with her.

And Densie, industriously going through the membership list, would be thinking: "I'll surely be entitled to just study the topics next year — and what was it we were to learn — some anecdote about Queen Anne?" quite oblivious of John's unmended house coat and Sally's disorderly room and the fact that Kenneth must take an iron tonic — and then all of these things would descend upon her suddenly and destroy any intellectual aspirations.

It was in the spring of 1904 that Densie realized the extent of politics in women's clubs; the fact that when she was sent as delegate to the city federation and entitled to a vote she was suddenly wooed as ardently as if she were Sally.

A woman unknown to her save through her name, a shining star in the club world, drove up to the flat and insisted on taking her through the parks. Densie hesitated, dismayed at her shabbiness, but the woman, Mrs. Worthington Prescott, insisted, paying her several flowery compliments — mostly about her cooking — and securing Densie's promise to vote for her as vice-president.

Mrs. Prescott never recognized her after the meeting and her successful election. Another woman sent her

violets and a pretty little note stating her hope of being treasurer and urging her great influence to help matters along; and still another came to call and purred graciously about everything in the flat and said Kenneth had a remarkably well-shaped head and that she hoped he would prove as brilliant as his little mother.

Densie smiled at this last. It seemed to her she would either have to stop housework or else her attempts at club life.

"Have I a soul above a frying pan?" she demanded of herself as she stood over the stove that night.

She began again to debate the unfair division of labor between the middle-class man and woman. She contrasted John's spick-and-span grooming each morning, his leaving the house not to return until night, confident of a good dinner, his splendid free day in the world, meeting new people, minds sharpening minds, ideas arguing with ideas, each gaining a fresh viewpoint, a firmer conviction, a new perspective — she envied him. And if he did not feel inclined to return he need not — he was head of the family, and business was a vast and expansive excuse.

He needed clubs for his business and banquets for his political aims and good clothes and vacations for appearance and mental relaxation, and Densie had always adoringly agreed.

After three years of flat life she began to rebel anew — just as she had done back at the Little House. She saw no goal ahead. Her daughters were both engrossed in their own interests; her husband more and more careless of her, less the husband and more the man of the world. She realized that it took money, position and personality to be a successful club or society woman. Women campaigned as men did — these clubs that Densie

had joined were not of good standing; they were called "the pussy-willow variety." They had seemed elegant to Densie — she was fond of old-fashioned adjectives, such as elegant and grand, and she used them, though her family promptly informed her that only shop-girls included them in their vocabularies.

The clubs that would really give Densie mental stimulus and soul massage were far beyond her — as yet. She had only burnt up the chops by ruminating at length over the situation.

X

The Sullivans moved in the spring, and a distressing crew, the Hendersons, came in their stead — three children, the father, mother and an aunt; and they took upon themselves the liberty of running up to Densie to borrow everything that they needed to make life livable!

"They've got the lend-me's," Kenneth said. "Lend me this and lend me that; and by heck, mummy, they've bought the place — the littlest boy told me so! So there's no chance for them to move in a year."

And he sat down rather pensively, though an hour later Densie saw him playing with the children, and she consoled herself by the thought that it might be a good thing for Kenneth.

The noise they made was intolerable, but their influence worse. Kenneth soon learned to swear in a finished fashion and he defied his mother — the boys downstairs did and "got by with it," and he mocked Sally and became an unmanageable sort of young person.

John was traveling most of the time, so he escaped the discomfort. He thought the newcomers all right and told Densie to pay no attention. If they wanted some eggs — why, give them some eggs, and when she saw the grocery man coming in with eggs for the Hendersons — well, go right downstairs and borrow some eggs in the name of Plummer! That was the man's solution. The woman's was different. If one did not return eggs voluntarily — why, there would never be anything said, but it would rankle; and when one's garden hose, rake, mops, baking powder, butter, gravy ladle and bowl, soup plates,

Castile soap and best table cloth were in turn trotted downstairs and not trotted back without a great deal of diplomatic hinting, things became strained and Densie learned what it means to live in a flat with someone who is not affable and who is addicted to the loan-me's.

Mr. Henderson's being the landlord added an extra gloom. The boys pummeled Kenneth and played sneak tricks on him, chawing beef with his white blouse and throwing his hat up on a roof; they deliberately tracked in mud on Densie's side of the vestibule, and called names after Sally when she trotted out to art school dressed in all her finery.

However, Mr. Plummer paid his rent and the Hendersons appreciated the fact, so they managed to agree to disagree, Kenneth bearing the brunt of the enmity. It was not pleasant. They felt as if they had taken rooms temporarily, Densie was unsettled and ill at ease, and when her clubs met for the fall she was lackluster, almost afraid to take part in them. She had a premonition that the Henderson boys would set fire to the house if she left it too much alone.

Sally laughed at her fears. Like her father Sally was seldom home. She had quarreled with Dean; he said she rouged like an actress and men turned to look after her on the street, while Sally, angered to the utmost, told him not to speak to her until she saw fit. Dean was two years older and two years wiser than Sally, and he took her at her word. She missed Dean — he had always been about, no matter what she wanted or when or where. But Dean had made up his mind to show Sally that he could exist without her.

"Of course, he is only Dean," she wrote Harriet, feeling she must have a confidante; the dreams and the dream characters had become a trifle shopworn and monotonous,

and she had reached that ridiculous stage wherein children feel that their mothers cannot understand them. Harriet was her only available outlet, and Harriet having been away so long had assumed kindly and unreal memories and possibilities. "Still, I do miss him, he was so obliging; and I suppose he is very wonderful to study the way he does and work at the same time. But I am no child, sister dear, and I cannot let my personality be submerged. How I envy you in New York, free to do as you like and study as you wish. I could never study as you do because I'm only Sally and cannot understand those awful problems you say you adore to understand — but some day I am coming to New York as an artist and have a studio and live in smocks and sandals if I like, and poor mummy won't have to fuss about me."

Here Sally inclosed a drawing of her Bohemian future with the sink used as a writing desk and her folding bed supposedly a luxurious bit of paneled woodwork to the outside. "I have done well with my work, but I have no encouragement or sympathy at home. Harriet, I feel we are women now and can talk frankly about our parents. Poor daddy! Mummy is so quiet and tired he finds her a bore and so he stays away. Daddy has quite a time keeping things afloat, and whenever he wishes to discharge Sam Hippler mummy cries and gets out all her old photograph albums. Harry, dear, isn't she too absurd?

"Then, I'm sorry for mummy, because she does want to stop housekeeping, and read things and go to her funny little clubs. Kenneth is positively a hoodlum these days; the Henderson boys have taught him terrible things, but maybe it is good for him. I'm sure I don't know. I feel I have my own self to develop properly so as to give the best of myself to the world through the medium-

ship of my art and I cannot decide the destinies of others."

Reading this over Sally decided it sounded very well, so she closed the letter abruptly lest she make a mistake and enrage her learned sister. She inclosed some sample menu cards which she had made for her father's club, and added naïvely: "These are just 'spot knockers' — I am going in for portrait painting."

Harriet being equally unfamiliar with Sally responded cordially, saying she understood the situation and that Sally must remember, first of all, she was a human being, and she must not stunt her mental growth or her natural abilities. She hoped Sally would come to New York as an artist and thus find herself, and she thought it lamentable that mummy was so helpless.

By the time the letter reached Sally a frivolous mood had overtaken her and she was intent on new frocks and the art of making gold-tinsel slippers by giving white ones several coats of luster paint. Harriet's letter sounded prosy and old-maidish and she crinkled up her little forehead thoughtfully as she debated which she would rather be — a famous artist or the leader of New York society, the latter winning without much of an effort. She called up Dean Laddbarry and told him to come and see her that evening, and when he did she even made candy for him and said she had only been fooling about being mad, thereby readjusting the rose-colored spectacles before his honest gray eyes and making Densie delighted at the prospect of Sally's becoming like other girls.

New Year's, 1905, brought an important event into Densie's life. As usual Harriet had avoided a home vacation. Through quiet ingenuity on her part Densie had been made delegate to a midwinter New York con-

vention of clubs. She mentioned this to John with the added wish that he attend.

"You always say you ought to go to New York more, and you have not been there once since Harriet went to school. Let us combine interests and go for a week. It is not right to have Harriet a stranger, and Sally is old enough to run the house and look after Kenneth. I was married when I was nineteen."

John debated the matter; it did not altogether suit him. He would want to do things Densie would disapprove of doing, and though Harriet was an inducement he began to think up excuses why he should remain home.

"But we haven't been on a trip together since Aunt Sally died. Before that I could leave the children with her. We went to Washington and to Pittsburgh and that fishing trip up in Canada — don't you remember? I'd like to see how it feels to go traveling with my husband."

She spoke lightly, but her lips trembled.

"Oh, if that's the case"— John good-naturedly laid aside his paper —"I suppose it's all settled. That's a fact, Densie, we haven't been anywhere together, have we?"

"And I haven't been to church in four months," she finished her confession. "We are getting to be backsliders."

"Let's turn over a new leaf, join some social clubs, do good theaters this winter. Hang it all, we're not old! I'm sure I'm not. And with the children nearly grown and Kenneth such a lamb there's no reason to be tied down."

"I haven't noticed that you were," she said demurely.

"Business would have gone to the wall if I had stayed by the fire like an old man," he objected testily. "I've tried to make you understand ——"

"Oh, I did, John, truly. It is just that all at once I wanted to go away some place else besides this city and this flat, to have someone else cook my meals and think about locking the door at night. It has been a long time since I have had a vacation. You see, the delegate's expenses are paid, and that makes it quite easy for you."

"What does this fearless delegate have to do? Stand on a soap box on the corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street and exhort wives to leave home and husband and study the nature of the heathen?"

He was laughing at her seriousness.

"No, it isn't religious — you never seemed interested before, so I never explained it. This one club is organized to keep abreast with the times, study current topics. You men don't realize how tied we American women are who do housework and bear and rear the family, at the same time being expected to be comrades to their husbands and intelligent hostesses for their husbands' friends! Take myself for example — I'm as hungry as a beggar to learn about the world outside my four walls."

"Um — do you go in for suffrage and that sort of thing?" He was a trifle disapproving.

"I have never joined the suffrage club, but I shall — when I have some more money. Clubs are not joined so easily as you think. You have the old-time notion of missionary sewing circles, where everyone came to gossip and eat doughnuts and drink coffee, and that was all there was to it. Some of the richest women in the city are club women, they fight for office as you have fought. Clothes, position, money, brains — are all valuable assets, but I think brains win out ultimately. We bring lecturers and singers from New York to brush us up, and we study as advanced things as we can find." Her face was flushed with eagerness.

"I don't know whether it's a good thing," John debated masterfully. "It takes up time and you can't seem content with anything else. I don't mean you, Densie, but I've heard husbands talk about it. If you had a great deal of money would you bother with it?"

"If I had a great deal of money," said this small rebel, "I would never wash another dish or darn a pair of stockings, cook another dinner or mop another floor. I would be as idle as the rose-leaf princess that I used to tell the children about for a bedtime story. I hate it!"

She stood up before her husband and crossed her arms defiantly.

"Why — Densie!" His world tottered about his ears.

"Why — John," she retorted, "you don't suppose I want to stay a little nobody, do you? I've tried to put all of you first and I shall keep on trying, only deep inside something says to me as it is saying to thousands of American women, 'Be yourself first of all!' And I have to keep that very carefully stifled."

"What has made you feel this way? Women never used to." He leaned forward anxiously, and as she looked at him her little face melted into a motherly smile.

"I don't know, John, dear. Don't worry — I shan't elope and be found disguised in men's clothes."

"I thought your clubs were only a pastime. You really take them seriously, Densie. Tell me — why do women take them so seriously?"

"Because you and I were born at the end of a certain era — American Victorian — call it what you like — but it was a distinct era with certain beliefs and limitations and admirable qualities; and it has ended.

Therefore, you and I, as many, many people of to-day, are dragged into the new era. I have no name for it as yet, but it ought to be a stimulating, splendid name, and it must be a more permanent era than the one just past. We of the old régime must either be labeled hopeless by the younger generation and be passed by, left to live with memories; or else we must forge ahead despite the handicaps of our early environment and be one with this new generation and its platform. You have done so, in a sense, because you are a man and have a man's rights — the rights that this past era unfairly gave to man and not to woman. You have stayed in the world and caught up with the march, you have not had the petty, humiliating, endless tasks that fall to no one else but a woman — a woman with a family. Oh, I don't mind the doing them, for I was taught it was a sacred mission — but they leave their mark when you try to keep step with the present-day trend of affairs. John, it is so much harder to be born at the end of one era than at the beginning of another — as our children were. Sometime this era will change too — in a hundred years or so — and with it will come another epoch. This strange frankness about all matters; this analytical, scientific, cynical viewpoint toward the old matters of faith and religion; this blunt, impolite method of brooking no interference with one's wishes and breaking away from home ties as our daughter has done; this curious, irreverent method of hasty living from day to day in the easiest, the most showy, the most extravagant fashion — it, too, will pass.

"And yet we must be fair — we of the older régime see only the faults of the new, even as they do ours; and there were strong virtues and benefits in each! I wonder if these modernists have not flattered them-

selves that they are progressive when they are really destructive. Has that ever occurred to you? John, sometime something will teach America to pray again with a child's faith and to conserve her resources and her energies, and if we of the older period are left that long on earth we may help her in her task. For with all the excess of sentimentality and slowness of action and narrowness of viewpoint of our era, we did learn to pray and to work and to save!"

She paused, embarrassed at her outburst. John was looking at her almost awesomely. But it is true that no man ever really loves a clever woman, he admires her and likes to take her in to dinner and declare she is the ideal girl for his chum to marry — but for himself some stupidly sweet little thing who can make flaky pie crust and wear ruffled white-muslin dresses is more to his heart's delight. Such a woman had Densie been, and now in her quiet, kindly manner she had told him a great truth. One always knows when a truth has been voiced even though he struggle to deny it. Densie had been born at the end of an era and thrust into a strange and confusing period of which she disapproved yet tried to imitate and follow. It echoed again to his ears that something might come to sweep aside America's gigantic cobwebs of extravagance and useless spending, fill her churches and crush her youthful conceit. It seemed prophetic. The thought annoyed him. It reminded him he was getting along. Densie was forty-one. He was forty-three. Br-r-r!

"You've been reading too much stuff," he said brusquely. "I think you better go buy a pretty dress and we'll do New York."

He tried to feel enthusiastic about it, but it was a

failure. He wondered if she would go to endless club meetings and drag him to lukewarm banquets and he would have to be surrounded by strong-minded women who were marching on to freedom — wherever that might be!

"I will buy a new dress; my things are too ancient to be seen. Sally has always had the right of way when it comes to clothes."

And he was thankful that she had sidetracked the more serious question. When Sally learned of the trip she was aggrieved that she was not to go. It was so unheard of for mummy to have a holiday; but after a little she had coaxed her parents to let her have a party and to buy a new muff. She was quite resigned by the time they were ready to go; after all, mummy would want her to be in bed by nine and daddy would be cross because mummy fussed, and she would not have had a good time. She would wait and save the money to go alone to visit Harriet. Who knew — if unhampered by an anxious mummy and a handsome daddy she might meet the great love of her life!

Densie bought smoky pearl-gray satin to make the dress herself, which she did and robbed it of any style, though the material was excellent. It looked a trifle queer she admitted as she tried it on. Still it was a new dress and she was an old married woman at whom no one would be apt to look. She got new boots and a black hat which Sally selected. Her old things must do for traveling. She found time to make Harriet some goodies and to cook and bake for Sally and Kenneth so as to last them well into the week.

They went down to the metropolis by night, arriving in the morning. John insisted on driving to the best hotel of which he knew though Densie timidly protested

it seemed a rather huge price to pay for a room and bath, and then all their meals extra. But John paid no attention to her murmurings.

She looked awesomely at the uniformed maids and liveried, patronizing bell boys, who viewed her superciliously. She felt strangely out of place in the modern bedroom, the cañonlike streets yawning below, and the rush and roar of the city in her ears.

After breakfast they started out to find Harriet — it was to be a complete surprise. It was Saturday morning, and according to Harriet's schedule she had no classes. They took a cab because John did not want to bother to find the way, and it was such fun to lean back and watch the city swirl about them.

XI

Harriet Plummer's boarding house was an old-time brown-stone-front affair. Yes, she was in, the woman said who opened the door.

Tiptoeing up the stairs Mr. and Mrs. Plummer knocked at her door. A small fair-haired girl with childish blue eyes and a pinched selfish mouth came in answer. She wore an elaborate smock, knickers of corduroy and was smoking a cigarette.

"I think we have made a mistake," John said briefly; "I was looking for Harriet Plummer."

"Oh, yes! Harry dear, someone for you," the small girl answered easily.

Then Harriet emerged in a severe brown-linen smock and knickers. She was not smoking, but a cigarette butt indicated that she had been. Her hair was cut short like a boy's and she was thinner and paler than ever before.

"Well," she began in her clipped fashion, "why didn't you let me know? Glad to see you. Hully, daddy! Here are my people, Leila." She waved an introduction with one of her slim hands.

John and Densie came in rather timidly and sat down. The room was in keeping with the two rising young feminists — severe and scant furnishings, some foreign prints on the wall, smoking stands, a great writing desk heaped with books and papers, golf sticks, a tennis racket and books piled in untidy stacks on the floor. The bedroom was a nondescript affair tossed together any old way — it was evident that the feminists merely slept

here and forgot its very existence the moment their eyes opened. A brass samovar, teacups and saucers showed the only signs of domesticity.

"How long are you going to stay?" Harriet asked after the first shock had subsided. "How's Sally and the boy? I've a lecture at eleven. Leila has to clear now, poor old thing! She's behind in two of her subjects; had to go home because of her mother's illness."

"Harriet helps me," Leila confessed. "Don't you think we've a nice place, Mrs. Plummer?"

"Very," Densie fibbed. She was still staring at the knickerbockers and cigarettes and shorn hair! "Harriet, you didn't say you had cut your hair."

"Oh, didn't I? It was such a bother to comb. Leila here keeps hers because hers is pretty. I'm afraid I never want to be bothered with combs and hairpins again. I'll leave my share to Sally."

"It doesn't look right," her father commented grimly.

Then he felt the situation was entirely too much for him. He would decamp and leave Densie to ferret out the new scheme of things and deal with it as she wished. So, after a few more commonplaces and Harriet's modest announcement that she was coaching three people a day in math and Latin and doing quite well in school and some simpering remarks from Leila, John departed, telling Harriet to get her mother back to the hotel safely and to come and take dinner with them that night.

"Your mother is here as delegate to a club federation," he ended formally.

"Oh, those women's clubs you've been joining. Is that it, mummy?" Harriet's eyebrows arched in amusement. "I am not interested in club movements. Here, daddy, here is the last thing I wrote that they thought good enough to make into a pamphlet — Study of

Women's Reformatories in New York and Connecticut. And next summer I'm appointed to a bully good thing; dress as a tough girl and go to the small New York towns that have canning factories, blow into the town presumably walking the ties and get a job at the factory, act as rough as I like and lay in wait to see if they are employing child labor. It may mean a great deal to me; we believe that most canneries keep two sets of books, one for the inspectors and one for their own use; and most factories are so situated to the railroad that an approaching stranger gives the warning himself, and into the vault goes the one set of books! I am positive of this — you remember when we first talked it over, Leila?"

Leila remembered. That was the best thing Leila ever did — to remember what Harriet said, and use it as her own original thought.

"You cannot go to strange towns dressed as a rough woman," began her father testily. "Great heavens! Is charity conducted on this scale?"

"You do not understand, daddy — but after you see the work I'll do, tracing child labor to its source and stopping it, you're bound to approve. Some of the canneries in the grape belt have had children of eight and nine helping pick, and some foreigners let their four and five year old babies shell peas or string beans and hold down a regular job!"

"Well, the poor souls know where their children are — better than letting them be run over by an automobile," murmured Densie. "I remember when such things existed and no one seemed to think them terrible."

"Mummy!" Harriet's dark eyes glowered with anger. "Please don't say that in front of my friends — you don't realize how you have committed yourself."

She exchanged compassionate glances with Leila. Leila's family were impossible too!

After John had left and Leila exchanged her knickers for a brief skirt and a tartan-plaid coat and mannish hat, saying a glib and affected good-by to "dear Mrs. Plummer," Densie took off her black cape and began to unpack the basket of goodies she had made.

"Really, mother," Harriet explained ever so kindly, "we diet. No meat — no tea or coffee — no sweets; cereals, vegetables, eggs three times a week, cheese and buttermilk. I cannot study when I stuff myself as I did at home." She looked with scorn at the sausage loaf, the cake, the jar of mayonnaise. "Thanks just the same!"

"You mean — you don't — want any of it?" Densie asked slowly.

"We couldn't use it. Once in a while we have a tea here for some of the students and we have jam and wafers, but we'd all rather smoke."

"So you do smoke, Harriet!"

Harriet flushed. She did not enjoy meeting her mother's steady disapproving gaze.

"You cannot keep me a baby all my days, mummy. You do a great many things I don't do, and I never complain. Well, grant me the same right."

"Why do you wear these things?" Densie pointed to the knickers.

"Convenience. Skirts are clumsy. Here, wrap these up and eat them yourself. They'll probably taste better to you than hotel fare." She began replacing the articles in their basket.

Without speaking Densie did so.

Presently Harriet ventured more cordially: "I hope you have some spare time when I have some spare time,

mummy. We are both busy, aren't we? What would you like to see?"

"I must attend the club meetings and I shall go home as soon as they have finished. Your father has no business here. He came to please me," she admitted lamely.

"How nice! You must go to the Metropolitan with me." Harriet assumed a martyred air. "And we'll do a theater, I suppose."

"No, dear; I only came to see my daughter." Densie laid the rejected basket beside her cape. "I felt you were growing to be a stranger to us, and I see that I was right. Tell me, who is this Leila?"

"Her name is Leila Cochrane, and she comes from Bangor, Maine. She is a darling girl," Harriet spoke with more enthusiasm than Densie could remember in years. "She is studying to be a librarian. We met each other last year and we've been rooming together since this fall; she means everything to me, mummy."

"Why did you never write about her?"

Harriet frowned. "I didn't think it was necessary. I'm old enough to room with whom I choose." She glanced at the mantel clock.

"When you have finished school next year do you intend coming home?" Densie's eyes were dark and anxious.

"No." Harriet looked at her directly. "I could never come home and be satisfactory to any of you, and least of all to myself. I expected an appointment and I think I shall take it. After a little I'll go abroad. I'd like to be statistician for the Whitechapel district in London."

"Then we've lost our oldest girl?" A tear showed on Densie's flushed cheek.

"Please, mummy, don't go into agonies. You are

too emotional to understand, I do believe." Harriet's irritation would not stay in check. "You don't want me to be a burden, a wastling? This is my work. I must do it my way. I haven't been any expense to you this last year — have I? Sally has — I know that without the asking. I never intend to be an expense; in fact as soon as I get a position I shall send you an allowance. I want to repay all you have done for me. Yes, I do; then you cannot say I have shirked in my part. It would be an economic crime not to do so — considering your and daddy's circumstances. But you must not delude yourself with thinking I'm coming home — because I shall live in my own way."

"I only want you to love me, Harriet. I don't really care about the rest. Only I cannot understand why young women smoke and cut their hair short and wear knickers when they are learning to help the poor and stop crime. And why they don't want to come home. It is a home, after all, Harriet; and these rooms are not. There is nothing here that suggests comfort or care or anyone's taking any particular pains."

"I cannot endure the smugness of a home," flashed back her child. "Homes are too often stagnant places, retarding progress. I shall never have a home. I am not a home woman — some are, I presume — but homes in the old sense are bound to pass away, just as you left the Little House and took a flat. We cannot always go on having ponderous drawing-rooms and steel engravings of Nelson and silver water pitchers in the dining room — that sort of thing. Where would we end if we were satisfied with that goal?"

"Where do you wish us all to end — and where do you intend ending?"

"With a great world-wide reform, coöperative house-

eeping, learn to be impersonal. I have tabulated some xperiments made by a professor — I'll show them to you. This is the day and age of the specialist, mummy, that s the great barrier between you and me. The old-time chool-teacher could make her clothes and help with the ıousework and teach her musty methods, as well as go ɔuggy riding with her young man and sing alto in the :hoir! Well, that may have been well enough, but to-lay the teacher must consecrate herself to her career. That career must come before all else. If a man is to ɔe a doctor he must learn to be a specialist. If a woman is to be a lawyer she must be nothing but a lawyer — that is the reform which is approaching. Do the one thing you are meant to do and do it with all your heart. Let the other people do the mechanics of mere living if they wish."

Harriet paused, her cheeks slightly crimson from excitement.

"I see. And as to religion, Harriet?"

"I am not interested in theology," her child answered calmly. "I prefer Egyptology as a recreation. . . . Of course, systems of philosophy are interesting. I find the Chaldeans entertained the same belief as to morals and a code of honor that I do myself. Now Leila admires the vikings. But beyond a fragmentary analysis I have never had the time to bother and I don't see much chance that I shall."

"Have you never met a man you fancied?" Densie asked in despair.

"I shall never love romantically," was the forcible answer. "What time have I for love?"

"You don't sew?"

"A woman makes this stuff for all of us. It saves the time and eyesight that we need for our work."

Densie rose. The older era had suffered a temporary defeat!

"I suppose you must go to your lecture — just start me toward my hotel. I won't afford another cab. I must be at the opening meeting this afternoon. You'll come to dinner with us, Harriet?"

"Thanks. May I bring Leila?"

Densie hesitated. "We wanted you to ourselves."

"Leila shares everything with me," Harriet protested.

"Then bring Leila," her mother said, turning away.

Harriet took her over half the way and left her, to scurry back to her lecture, telling herself that perhaps it was just as well they had come — there would have had to be a definite understanding sooner or later. It was annoying — but then, it never could have been anything but annoying, and once over it was a good task accomplished. Dear little mummy, she would send her as generous an allowance as she could afford. Harriet was naturally just and generous — and she was fearless. What she believed she lived, and her Uncle Herbert used to say that her word was as good as a Chinaman's. She hated to hurt her mother — it was like tearing old lace, she admitted to herself. But it was inevitable. As for her father, Harriet's sense of humor came to the rescue — her father looked quite gay and well cared for — she had no fears for him. He too had broken away from the old ties and was probably living his own life in his own way.

In a bewildered state of mind Densie answered the convention roll call, but she was distinctly sorry she had come to New York. Her dress proved to be a fright, as she heard someone murmur when she passed; the others were beautifully gowned and jeweled creatures or else very trig tailored affairs that made one address them with

respect. Everyone seemed to know everyone else, and Densie alone was strange. She did not know what to do. She knew her club expected some sort of glowing report; they would have liked some evidence that their delegate had been a success and deserving of notice — but beyond the roll call and consenting to have a window just back of her opened for more air Densie Plummer played no part in the convention.

She did not catch the full meaning of the addresses, because she was thinking of Harriet, with her shorn head, her cigarettes, her heartless plan of life, her refusal to stay at home or return to it, her argument that so much money a month would be a worthy substitute and heart balm. Densie's little mouth set in a firm line as she experienced a quiet sort of desperation. She was losing out. Four years ago she tried to make a great advance and overtake this younger generation swinging by her so carelessly. But she had not overtaken them; they were passing her more rapidly than ever before!

She knew they rose for a benediction and a buzz of small talk filled the parlors. Someone handed her a program on which were scheduled the meetings and committee meetings, and that was all.

She returned to her hotel, to find John waiting with the announcement that after they had Harriet for dinner they would go to the theater with the Fergusons, friends of his. He had met Ferguson accidentally and they had made the date. After the theater they would go to supper at a famous café. Densie must see the place; it was worth the price of their codfish alias crab meat.

"What about Harriet?" John concluded irritably. "I can't make the girl out — what does she say?"

Briefly Densie told him.

He shook his head. "You should have brought her up differently, Densie; that is not the way for her to be."

Densie gave a choked laugh. "I — brought her up differently? That is funny! Suppose you talk with her!"

"It is not my place. I want to stay friends with her or she'll go putting me in her statistics." John really took a humorous view of the matter. "The girl is on the way to success in her line, and I suppose it's this modern era, little woman; the one you were telling me about — remember?"

"I suppose — but shall we try to make her change her mind?"

"Heavens, no! In captivity Harriet would be worse than a Bengal tiger. She's sound at heart — merely odd. It's a poor family that can't afford one genius — and a rubber plant, y'know."

Humming a popular air John went below to wait for his modern daughter.

Densie remonstrated once that the girls were not eating enough nutritious food, only to be properly reprimanded by a shower of statistics and tables of food values; after which she let John and Leila do the talking while Harriet cynically viewed the gay dining room and Densie thought with rebellion of her good food upstairs, which was wasted while they paid absurd prices for inferior messed up concoctions.

Harriet and Leila had donned severe silk frocks out of respect to John and Densie, and Harriet's felt hat hid the short hair. Leila and John carried on a bantering conversation of nonsense at which Harriet seemed amused. It struck Densie it was silly and useless, and her

head ached as she tried to remember all that had happened at the federation meeting.

But if the dinner was bad the evening was far worse. From the first sight of Mrs. Ferguson, in a rich green satin with sealskin bands and a cloudy hat of black tulle and with an evening coat thrown over her arm, Densie felt a greater despair than before. She saw John's eyes smile admiringly at her and then give a quick side glance at his own wife.

Mrs. Ferguson was kind to Densie, but she sat beside John and kept asking him little questions the answers to which conspired to show how very stupidly innocent she was and how extremely wise he must be! She thought him handsome and attractive, and said afterward it was a shame he was tied to a dowdy mouse.

The musical comedy shocked Densie; to her mind it was immodest. She recalled going to good Shaksperean plays as a girl, but this hodgepodge of legs and flirtatious eyes, claptrap comedy and suggestive humor, loud untrained voices shouting some lusty "I am surprised at you" sort of song — wearied and confused her; and she longed for the Little House, where at least she could be at peace.

After the theater came the cabaret with its singers and confetti and paper festoons to entangle one's old-style bonnet. The others had champagne and some chafing-dish dainty — not fit to eat — but Densie sat nibbling her plate of rolls and trying to keep up a conversation with Mrs. Ferguson, who looked at her in open amusement.

"I'm more tired than if I had washed," she told John when they went to their room. "How can people do this sort of thing all along?"

"This is play. You ought not be tired." The cham-

pagne had made him good-natured. "By the way, isn't Ferguson's wife a winner? Jove, she looks well in that dress. A lot of women wouldn't have carried it off."

He did not add anything else, but Densie knew his thoughts.

"How long have they been married?"

"About ten years, I guess"

"Any children?"

"No."

"So I thought." Densie brushed her hair methodically and kept her own counsel.

"People marry later than they used to," John ruminated; "and I don't know but what these early marriages are a mistake. Children shoved into a life contract — they don't know their own minds. By George, they don't!"

Densie did not answer. Tears came to hide the dark blue eyes. She wondered if she could pretend she was suddenly ill and go home. She could not stand any more of this.

But she did — after six days of routine convention meetings at which she was duly snubbed and ignored, and glimpses of Harriet in between times, Densie realized a new vital thing. It was not pleasant to realize — it never is — but with such a woman as Densie and such a man as John and such a — everything as surrounded them, it was imperative she should realize and accomplish it. She must begin to earn her own money. That alone would win her respect and self-confidence!

John had deserted her the morning after the theater party. He wanted to look up some business men who would be likely to be home on a Sunday. He had luncheon at the Fergusons' on Monday, telling Densie that they had a gem of an apartment and Mrs. Ferguson was the

est hostess in the world, she knew how to make folks eel at home and yet entertain them. Lucky Ferguson! ınd he went with Harriet into the slums and returned to ell Densie that Harriet had a brain in ten thousand and hough he would rather she would not stay away from ıome they might as well try to persuade the Rock of Gibraltar to toddle across to New York Harbor.

So Densie boarded the train with this new duty im- ɔressing itself upon her. If she was to catch up with :he younger generation she must earn her own money and ıer own economic and social independence!

XII

Sally and Kenneth met them at the train, Kenneth jumping up and down with joy at the sight of his mother. Densie looked at Sally with relief — with all her fussy clothes and dreams. Sally was Sally, who really wanted to kiss her mother a dozen times and put her arms round her father unashamedly. Harriet loathed embracing; it was a relic of barbarism, she said she had come to believe.

"And how have you kept house, Sally?" her father asked as they made for a cab.

"Very well; haven't I, Ken? We did not brush the dust behind the doors or eat a can of lobster every day for lunch." Both of which things Sally had threatened to do when she was displeased at their going. "Doesn't Kenneth look well fed, mummy? Feel his arm; I haven't starved him."

"Sally has a new beau," Kenneth announced. "A real old man too!"

Sally gave him a little shake. "How dare you tell a fib? Don't believe him, mummy. I've met someone very wonderful, that's all."

"And he gave me a dollar." Kenneth felt it his duty to make a complete report. "And Henderson's goldfish have all died, and Mr. Henderson was drunk Thursday night."

"Proceed," urged his father. "Let us know the rest about this new cavalier."

"Daddy — as if he was ——"

"Well, when Aunt Maude Hatton and Aunt Lucy Parks were coming for supper and Mr. Humberstone wanted to come Sally sent the aunts word not to come!"

Sally gave him a little pinch. "You mean little thing!" she said sharply. "Don't look horrified, mummy. It was just that I knew they would never be congenial — nothing else."

"Why didn't you send Mr. Humberstone word not to come?" asked Densie.

"Oh, because she likes him. M-m-m."

Kenneth kissed the air loudly several times.

"Sally!"

Sally's face crimsoned. "It isn't so at all. That isn't very nice, Ken, after all I've done for you this week!"

"Let's see the young man," suggested her father. "Gad, it's a relief to find a young woman that has a beau. Your sister Harriet flees at the sight of a male — long haired socialists are her speed."

"What is he like, Kenneth?" Densie asked.

She had been looking closely at her daughter and marveling at the change a week could make. For some reason she took the mention of this new cavalier seriously — unpleasantly so.

Sally's eyes were more intense, there was an air of importance and sophistication about her.

"Well, there is a big black dog that lives up on the avenue," began Kenneth deliberately; "he is a very wealthy dog, I guess — and he has a jeweled collar and a sweater, but he won't let anyone pet him. He'll stand off and go 'Woof, woof!' and show his teeth, and his eyes are real mean — but he is scared to ever bite anyone or lick any other dog, even a cur — and that is like Mr. Humberstone. Oh, Sally!"

He burst into tears as Sally's hand descended across his mouth before Densie could interfere.

Fortunately, they had reached home, and Kenneth was taken upstairs to be consoled, while Sally followed in aggrieved silence and John paid off the teamster. Sally had a breakfast ready for them. It touched Densie to think she would do this, after Harriet's brusque method of entertainment. After all, Sally was bound to meet strangers and strangers were bound to love Sally — so perhaps Mr. Humberstone was inevitable.

Peace restored, they sat down to eat. It was with relief that Densie returned to her flat. The New York experience had exhausted her physically and mentally. Besides, she had lost caste in her husband's eyes, and the federation of clubs was none the wiser that she had come and gone.

She noted a handsome centerpiece of roses and lilies of the valley on the table.

"How extravagant, Sally dear!" she said fondly. "But how lovely!"

"Mr. Humberstone sent them to me," Sally announced proudly.

"Those cost a good deal. What business is he in?" mused her father.

"A stock broker," Sally answered with equal pride. "His name is Rex Humberstone and he lives at the Century Club. He is a little older than I — I don't just know how much — but you'll like him."

"Oh, yes; I know who he is — Humberstone — tall, thin, copper-colored face and wears gold pince-nez. Well, well, he is a good bit older than you, young lady. We must see about this."

"How did you come to meet him?" added Densie anxiously.

"Mrs. Sullivan had a little party. I went and took Kenneth."

"Yes, and she made me go to sleep in the back bedroom, and she came home with Mr. Humberstone and left me there, and I woke up in the dark and didn't know where I was and I hollered," supplemented Kenneth conscientiously.

Densie shook her head.

"We met there, daddy"— Sally devoted herself to her father —"and he asked to call and I said he might. I'm not a child; and don't believe this horrid little boy. He sent me the flowers yesterday."

"Oh, he's a real, true beau." Kenneth slipped out of his chair.

"Humberstone! I've heard something about him." John drew out a cigar and clipped the end. "Can't think just now. By the way, Sally, your sister has short hair and smokes — she is all aflame to reform the world. Poor mother, between Harriet and the traffic squad she did not know which way to turn."

"Her hair short — how silly!" Sally glanced in the mirror at herself. "What did you say to her, mummy?"

"Not much. She said everything to me."

"Is she coming home next year?"

"No; Harriet wants to stay in New York; the opportunities are better for her work."

"Oh," Sally paused thoughtfully. "Well, I can see her viewpoint! After all, Harriet has a right to do as she wishes."

That night Rex Humberstone was to call on Sally and meet her mother. So far so good, Densie decided, though when she asked Sally about Dean Laddbarry she was disappointed to hear Sally say they had quarreled again and that she loathed boys.

"Oh, mummy dear, Mr. Humberstone is so wonderful! I have never met anyone in the world that was quite such a prince!" All of Sally's dream people had vanished now that reality had won her heart. "I feel it is fun just to be alive — so as to see what will happen next!"

She dressed herself in a blue frock shirred in interesting places, and combed her hair high like a dowager's, awaiting Mr. Humberstone's pleasure. John was out for the evening, and Kenneth was hustled to bed; he was in deep disgrace in Sally's eyes.

She went about rearranging the parlor and living room and complaining that this or that was out of place and old-fashioned.

"He's so cultured, mother, you've no idea, and has such exquisite manners! Oh, mummy, you are not going to stay in the room with us all evening, are you?"

"Don't you want me?" Densie asked simply. Dean always demanded where she was and insisted on her joining them.

"Well, we can't talk as well — you know how it is, mother," Sally argued.

"I'm quite tired — so I won't want to stay long anyway."

Densie made herself dismiss her fears.

"Do change your dress. Put on the gray-satin one."

"Nonsense! This isn't anything but someone's calling on you. How are the art lessons?"

"I haven't had time to do anything this week. Do change your dress. Mr. Humberstone is used to seeing people beautifully gowned; he has lived in Paris and London."

So Densie, tired as she was, put on the little gray dress and let Sally curl her hair, and after a while —

at a very late hour, so Densie thought — the bell rang and Mr. Humberstone awaited an introduction.

He was just as John had said, tall and thin, with inscrutable mocking eyes which showed the whites all round them, his pince-nez giving him a distinguished air. He wore striped lavender trousers and a black cutaway coat, an exquisite white-silk shirt and tie and a scarfpin, a first-water diamond. He had soft white hands, the nails highly polished, and his patent-leather boots were as good as mirrors in regard to their finish. His mouth was thin and cruel and had queer little dents at the end. Densie could not fathom him; he was utterly baffling, since no one could really look at his eyes and read their meaning.

He met Densie with a bored, slightly amused air, though painfully deferential, but his mocking, dancing eyes kept looking at Sally, who fluttered about him in all her helpless prettiness.

After a very little Densie found herself dismissed; she did not just know how it was done, but she had said good night like a submissive child and was on her way to bed. Sally was going to show Mr. Humberstone her book of sketches.

As Densie passed down the hall Kenneth hailed her, beckoning from the darkness to come into his room.

"Sh-h, Kenneth! What is it?"

"You remember what I said he was like — the wealthy dog?"

Densie smiled in spite of herself.

"Remember?" he persisited.

"Yes." She caught the sound of Sally's high-pitched nervous laugh and the bass rumble of Humberstone's voice. It frightened her!

"Well — ain't he?"

XIII

Rex Humberstone knew how to charm a young girl. He had had much experience with both men and women, and he seldom made a mistake in his method. With Sally he used the never-failing advice, "If you would win the girl woo the woman in her." He saw the things that grated in her home, the rather unæsthetic surroundings, he had known her father outside somewhat, and he looked upon Densie with the contempt with which such men do upon a simple home body.

Kenneth's silver dollar was followed by as many more as he was allowed to take. Sally, whose whole heart and mind were given over to this newcomer, seemed merely to float in space and be oblivious of everyday duties or happenings.

At first Densie protested about Sally's going to a hotel dinner alone, it did not seem to her the proper thing, but Sally had turned on her in angry defiance and said that if she did not go to-night she would run away from home to-morrow; Mr. Humberstone loved her, she was sure of it, and he had the right to ask her to accompany him in public.

"But, Sally dear," her mother argued, "don't you think he would better wait until you are engaged — then it would be his right. But not now; you have only known him three months."

"My dear mummy, we cannot all make love as you and father did. Everyone goes to hotel dinners now — it is quite the thing. And oh, the way he spends his money!

Why, he spares no pains to give me everything I want."

She was dressing herself in a silver-gauze frock she had concocted from remnants; it had the style of a Fifth Avenue garment and it became her well. A black feathered hat was on her dressing table, and long white gloves suitable for a ballroom. Densie shook her head.

"At the afternoon party at the Century Club he had a wonderful corsage waiting for me when I came in. All the women envied me; older, married women, too. No one was quite so handsome or witty, and everyone was surprised that he had singled me out for his companion. You see he is a modern man of the world — so you must not judge him by your old standards."

"He drinks, Sally. His face shows that plainly."

"So does father," she flashed back. It was the first time the subject had ever been mentioned between them.

"Not with my consent or in my house. Besides, that does not excuse Mr. Humberstone."

"All men drink a little — and women too. It is very antique not to see the reason in it."

"Have you taken things to drink when you were with him?" Densie clutched her daughter's arm.

"Yes." Sally tilted her reddish-gold head in defiance. "Goodness, don't look as if I had committed murder! A glass of champagne with dinner is only the proper thing."

Densie was silent. Sally readjusted the hat a half dozen times.

"Do I please you?" she demanded, whirling round.

"No, it does not please me at all. I cannot like Rex Humberstone."

Sally's face went white with sudden anger. "Then we must agree to disagree. What will you say when we are married?"

"I will wait until he comes to ask us for you!"

" Rex is romantic; he is liable to kidnap me and ask no one."

" That is not the way. There is only one way to do such things, Sally — the dignified way. Don't make a mistake that will shadow your life. I do not like this man. What do you know of his past? He may have been married before for all you know."

" Am I to send a detective about after him? "

" I would rather see you do that than marry a stranger. A good man never resents investigation — only a rogue does that. I do not like the superlative way he does things — the excessive attentions are neither normal nor sensible, nor do they augur for being permanent. You could not go on having such attentions after marriage — you would have no time for duties. These flowers, these boxes of candy, these beautiful things he has given you on so slight an acquaintance! More than that, Sally, the fact that he does not find congenial surroundings in your own home — Dean Laddbarry would rather come to see you in your own home than any other place. And so it should be! "

" That boy ——" Sally began impatiently.

" That boy — bless him! " repeated her mother.

" Don't begin praising Dean. All very well in his way, but it is not my way. Rex is my ideal — why, everyone is mad about him — the way he dresses, the way he talks ——"

" And his character? "

" I'm sure I have never seer any glaring vice. I do hope you won't go about asking people as to his character — I'm old enough to take care of myself."

" He does not like me." Densie picked up some trifles after Sally. " He is never comfortable in my presence — have you noticed? "

"You are both from and in different worlds." Sally was weary of the debate. "I'm sure he is always polite."

"That is the least of it. Sally, I am afraid that Rex only loves your beautiful unlived youth — don't let him rob you of it. Think well." She peered anxiously at Sally's beautiful little face.

Sally shrugged her shoulders. "If he loves my youth I adore his wicked middle age," she said flippantly. "We are like Jack Sprat and his wife."

"You think he will marry you?"

"Of course — as soon as he thinks it's time to speak!"

"He is not the marrying kind." Densie's lips closed in a firm line.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean he is the sort that plays 'pal'— long-drawn-out affairs that end nowhere for the woman! The kind that takes your youth as his shield against age, that delights in 'playing.' But marriage, a house, a family, a tired wife instead of a pretty unhampered girl always concert pitch for him — no, that is not his wish or intention. Old-fashioned as I am I have seen such men before. I warn you. He wants to be a playmate, Sally, not a husband — there is a rare satisfaction in having such an exquisite young girl as his prize, keeping her away from her own kind. Youth should be with youth, my child. You will find your friends will drop away; you will have to meet and know his friends — equally bizarre, battered men and knowing women of the world. They delight in stealing youth whenever they can."

Sally wrapped her cloak round herself carefully.

"To-morrow night Rex is going to take me to his club dance. I shall not be home until late — and we are going to the theater Friday. Is there anything you wish to say?"

Her voice was as impersonal as Harriet's had been. Densie felt stabbed. Kenneth was all that was left to her — and even Kenneth would soon be grown up.

"No," she said, making no further advance; "I wish you would take a key. I am tired and shall go to bed very early."

She stood at the window with Kenneth and watched Sally step into the machine that Humberstone had sent for her. That was another point of variance between Sally and her mother. Why did Humberstone send a cab or an auto for her? Why could he not have come personally, as Dean always did, and chatted with her mother in friendly fashion while Sally gave herself a last prink?

Densie did not approve of this any more than of the public hotel dinner, unchaperoned. She wondered what her Aunt Sally would have said — she could almost hear her stinging reproof.

"Well, mummy, shall we have games to-night?" asked Kenneth as the machine whirred away.

"If you like." Densie stroked his flaxen head. "Kenneth, when you grow up and have someone as pretty as Sally who likes you, always go get her, son, and be nice to her mother."

"I don't want any dames," said Kenneth, to his mother's surprise.

"Who told you to say dames instead of women?"

"The kids. By heck, you ought to hear the new way to swear — shall I show you?"

"No, never swear — not even in your thoughts?"

"If you don't do your share of it the kids make you put your tongue on a frosted iron post — you know what that does," he protested.

"Well, let's make taffy," Densie proposed vaguely.

She was trying mentally to juggle the destinies and problems of her family and herself and remember at the same time how much sugar to how much molasses.

Sally was having one of her wonder times. Seated across the rosy shaded table in a discreet corner of a palm room, a string orchestra playing light catchy things that make one's feet tap and one's heart beat a trifle faster, she looked at Rex Humberstone with unconcealed adoration. His mocking eyes stared at her with a pleasant and rather triumphant expression, which Sally did not perceive. She was telling him some girlish experience with all the added zest of having a beloved audience, her imagination heightening some of the details and beautifying some of the setting.

"You like me a little, don't you, Sally?" Humberstone asked as she finished.

"Of course!" Sally could not pretend with Humberstone, she was too much infatuated not to throw down all armaments.

"I'm older than you," he bantered.

"I hate boys," she insisted.

"Do you know how pretty you are? I've seen the most beautiful women in Europe and I'd rather know Sally Plummer than any of them."

"Really?" She laid down her knife and fork.

"Really! You don't know your charm yet. I suppose I'll have to sit by and be a mere onlooker in a little while, won't I?"

"Not unless you want to." She smiled childishly at him.

"Does your mother mind your coming to dinner?"

"Mother's old-fashioned," was all she told him.

"You're not — you're the newest, loveliest fashion I've ever had the good fortune to meet. I never liked

anyone half so much as you — let us have some champagne and pledge eternal friendship — will you, Sally?"

"I'd be happy to," she said demurely.

The champagne was very sparkling and bitter sweet, and it made her feel delightfully relaxed and willing to agree with the world at large; it made the music gayer and the food far better tasting, the dining room more attractive and Humberstone more to be adored.

He knew how to entertain her, to tell her this and that incident of his life, to flatter her subtly and praise her, making her feel that all other men were boorish and uninteresting and that no one but Rex Humberstone, wisest of men, really understood her complex nature.

So they pledged their friendship with the wine and then went off to a vaudeville bill, with Humberstone tenderly folding her cloak about her and half lifting her into the cab.

Sally had thought during the dinner to ask him with childish bluntness why he had never married — to which he had glibly made reply: "Because I made myself wait for you."

And Sally thought of that as they whirled off to the vaudeville with Humberstone dangerously close beside her. She dismissed any scruples about being unchaperoned because of what he had said. She was going to marry him and have nothing but love, romance, luxury, adoration — in truth, it was fun to be alive and see what would happen next!

She came home after the vaudeville, to be left at her doorstep, because Humberstone said he must not keep her up any later. But the next morning he sent her a fascinating blue-leather engagement book with a little gold pencil, the card accompanying it saying:

"For Sally to keep her Rex engagements in line — no

hers will remain legible if she tries to write them down! his is a magic book."

She showed it to her mother delightedly. She had not ɔt up until late and was having a ten-o'clock cup of coffee.

" It is lovely, dear — but he ought to wait until he has oken," was all Densie could be prevailed upon to say. Don't let him be a time waster — so many men like him erely want the fun of a young girl's companionship, and hen they do marry it is cold-bloodedly — to gain money : position."

Sally set her coffee cup down with a little clatter. You are impossible," she began, " and I shall not tell ɔu anything more. I was going to tell you," she added ith unconscious humor, " about the beautiful time we ad — an eight-dollar dinner and champagne — yes, hampagne to pledge our friendship with, and it was quite roper, I'm sure. I saw two of daddy's friends eating here and they bowed to me quite respectfully. I was as ell dressed as anyone in the dining room, and Rex said I ooked the prettiest of all. We had alligator-pear salad — did you ever eat it? And peach Melba for dessert, nd a special sort of coffee made by a little black boy in a Turkish costume — with rum burning on top! I adore uch ways of living. When I'm married I want to live it hotels and never, never have to bother about anything ɔut clothes! " She yawned wearily.

" What lesson is it to-day? " Densie had finished rumbing the table.

" I can't take any lesson to-day — I want to think about ast night. Besides, there's the dance to-night and I must e down this afternoon. Make Ken play outside."

Densie stood in the doorway between the dining room nd the kitchen.

" Your father would not like you to do this, Sally.

You look tired to death this morning, and if you're e going to do anything with your art you'll have to k on applying yourself. Mr. Humberstone doesn't seem think of anything but what he wishes. Though if h a business man I should think he would have to get early too."

"Rex has money — he's a stock broker and it i like having daddy's warehouse. You don't seem able understand that there can be different — different stra of society."

With which Sally flounced out of the room leav Densie to do the dishes and wonder, first about Rex H berstone, then about Harriet, next John, and lastly neglected little interests, which had been, perforce, sho aside since she returned from New York in January.

XIV

John laughed at Densie's worries regarding Sally. When Rex took her to the country club, and she returned, her dress torn from a too rough cotillion and her cheeks flushed with wine, a fool's cap and a few trifles as a reward for the evening's exertion, Densie used to plead with her to stop this nonsense or at least wait until she was Rex's wife.

But John was rather pleased with her "success," as he named it. He, too, believed in the "different stratas of society." Moreover, Humberstone had a certain fast rich following; they made money quickly and lost it at an equal speed. One never knew how they were progressing. They lived at a consistently fast gait, however, with sometimes the other fellow's I O U's in their pockets and sometimes theirs in the other fellow's. Humberstone was more or less of an enigma. He had come from New York a short time previous to his meeting Sally, a middle-aged man who could drink everyone under the table, who understood the gentle art of poker, who owned a good race horse, had a smart roadster, played three-cushion billiards and had trophy cups from London to prove his record, who dressed in the latest fashion with silk shirts heavily monogramed and weird expensive suits that no one else "could have gotten away with," as Sally's father rather enviously admitted. John was tiring of the standardized tweed for business and black serge for Sunday.

Humberstone dabbled in stocks, was interested in cop-

per mines and played cards altogether too well for a gentleman. He never pressed his business interests on anyone, they had to come to him, wherein lay the secret of his success. He knew how to attract attention without seeming to do so. He read French novels in conspicuous places so that no one could help noticing, and had autographed photographs of prominent persons. No one knew how he obtained them, but he would casually refer to the time he had visited the Prince of Monaco and had a bully run on the Monte Carlo bank, or the coaching trip the Duchess of Lansdowne gave, during which he was expected to pay attention to an extremely ugly Russian princess. It was well done — and not overdone. But if anyone looked closely at him his face had that soft, flabby look which tells of the lack of real living and doing; he was " soft all over," as Kenneth put it — and a coward in everything except conversation.

He had always been popular with married women until he met Sally — he was a most obliging bachelor, eternally making a complete table for bridge or the needed person at an informal dinner, ready to turn the pages of music for some dizzy soprano or to have a shot at pool with cloth-cutting nuisances, yet retaining his interest to all appearances. He understood the way married women felt neglected when romance flew out the window and nothing flew in. He knew how to be a gallant escort — even umbrellas were gracefully handled in his long white hands, and he used to describe his duels when a student at Heidelberg in a nonchalant fashion that made the average blue-serge-suited American who had never done anything more thrilling than have a finger tip cut off in a mowing machine writhe in envy.

He invested a " trifle " for John Plummer and doubled it. This made John lenient toward him, and when he

had told Densie and she had expressed no approval he said she was in danger of becoming narrow-minded; these clubs seemed to make manhaters out of the women. Sally was having her fling, he declared, and if she chose to marry Rex — well, the child could do a great deal worse.

"No mere boy could supply Sally's wants or her craving for excitement — she is really adapted to an older man," he insisted. "As for Humberstone's not spending his evenings here — well, I don't blame him. He is not used to a conservative home with a family Bible to stare him out of countenance."

So with John as an aid and abetter Sally went her own way — to dance and theater and dinner, motoring or driving or sailing — nothing very strenuous, such as Dean's old-time hikes or fishing trips or five sets of tennis in an afternoon — nothing of that sort. She read all the novels Rex bought for her, and allowed them to change her views and color her notions. He gave her many beautiful things — ribbons and lace handkerchiefs and boxes of beautiful gloves and a charming little rope of pearls. Densie said an engagement ring would be more to the purpose! He also lavished money on Kenneth and insisted on buying him a bicycle; and when he met John he took him over to the club and treated him royally. But Densie remained a stranger.

She wrote Harriet she was worried about the affair and that if Sally did marry him she was bound to be unhappy. To which Harriet replied in a sincere and characteristic fashion that polarities were bound to marry and that from all her mother said she judged Sally and Mr. Humberstone were polarities, and if so the union might easily be an agreeable surprise — statistics proved that when foreigners married each other without acquaintanceship be-

forehand the resulting estrangements often came from th fact of the husband and wife being entirely alike as t views and tastes and therefore no contrasting current o ideas to stimulate felicity!

That was all Harriet had to say on the subject. Ma riage never appealed to her personally and she was to intent on winning a five-hundred-dollar prize for an essa — half of which she was to loan Leila so Leila need n go home for her vacation, but stay on in the city for th summer courses. It did not occur to Harriet, despite h promises, to send the possible prize money home to h mother or to come home herself. Harriet was to take summer course also, and to make her trip to the cannir factories to unearth the child-labor conditions and flau them before an uninterested Washington Congress.

Sally grew very slender and older looking; circles we under her eyes and she had an actual need of rouge. Sl spent nearly all her time on clothes — for like all jad men Humberstone depended on novelty to sustain his i terest. Had Sally appeared in calico he would not ha seen her beauty so vividly. But because she lent all h ability to making new creations and because she had th skin, eyes and hair that could wear what few others coul he never found himself bored with her. He liked th facts that people turned to watch them as they passed ar that men said to him in private: "Who's the bonny i fant — you old rascal?"

At which he would preen himself and offer to treat to drink.

"Has he never talked about his own home?" d manded Densie one morning when Sally was entirely tc listless and headachy to allow her mother's heart to be normally. "If he does not tell you about his family shall ask him!"



"I want to paint pretty useless things — and drum a little on the piano, and make oodles of clothes and hats and just stay at home." (*See page 94*)

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"If you insult him I'll never let him come to the ouse," Sally defied her. "If daddy is satisfied — and addy is round town and knows — what have you to ıy?"

"You have not answered my question."

"Yes, of course he has — but his family are all dead - years and years ago. He has a sister in Australia — ıat's all I know or care. I'm not going to marry his ımily."

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

"Not yet." Sally was on the verge of tears. She as beginning to wonder about her engagement herself, ıt she would not admit it now.

"And where was he educated?"

"I don't know nor care! I love him. When we are arried I'll know all about his past, I suppose."

"A woman who marries a man without knowing about s past beforehand is a foolish virgin," her mother said lemnly. "I don't suppose you are going to art school -day. You don't seem to ever want to go. But I shall ıt be home for luncheon, so please see to Kenneth, will ıu?"

"Club meeting?" asked Sally insolently. "The Psyology of a Daffodil, I presume!"

"What would you do if I decided to become a real ıb woman?" Densie asked sharply. "Would you miss e home!"

"We would all rejoice; it is a bit hard to forge ahead d have someone eternally drag you back."

Tears came into Densie's eyes. Without speaking she ft the room and, presently, the house. The moment she ıd gone Sally telephoned to Rex.

"I'm blue to-day," she coaxed. "Can't we do someing this afternoon?"

"Of course we can — say what!" Humberstone was

blue, too — bored to extinction with himself, and relying on Sally's vivacious spirits.

"Let's take a long drive and dinner at the Turnback Inn."

"I'll call for you at two, lady," he ended the conversation.

Sally rushed Kenneth through his lunch and proceeded to dress herself with care. The day suddenly became rosy and worth while. She did not realize what was happening — that she was fast becoming dependent on Rex Humberstone for her joy of living, that he was a stimulus which, when wanting, made everything seem stale and unbearable. It was like living in a play to be his pal — he never seemed to consider money or time, and he was the most distinguished, unusual person in the world. No wonder the married women called her a doll and bowed coldly to her. Indeed they began to say, "If that was my daughter," and to murmur awful things about Humberstone and say that Sally was certainly older than twenty years and a designing little minx.

So goes the see-saw.

Sally put on a creamy linen dress with a soft little blue-silk coat and a motor bonnet. She wore blue-suède shoes and stockings to match, as well as a pair of fresh gloves. She was a pretty picture as he drew up before her door — the Hendersons all lined up to watch the procedure!

Sally had left a note for her mother. She danced into the roadster to look up adoringly at Humberstone. Automobiles were still rather scarce and Humberstone's was an attractive black-and-white affair with side curtains and limousine trappings.

It was a warm June day with the country that light tender green, and with blossoms perfuming the dusty roads. Sally and early summer were synonymous. Hum-

berstone felt again that exhilarated thrill of youth that he had fancied was forever lost as they darted in and out the country roads, over hills, beside streams, with Sally, veritable spirit of the season, at his side.

They had dinner at the Turnback Inn, a semifashionable sort of place, where they found a private dining room and proceeded to order an elaborate menu. They took a quick trip in a motor launch on the near-by creek, while Humberstone told Sally of Italian skies and how well she would compare with the women in Paris, and Sally sat listening to him, her gold eyes like great suns in happy innocence.

Humberstone always messed his food, as Densie would have called it. She had taught her children the doctrine of the clean plate as she had been taught, and to eat whatever was set before them unless it was alcohol! Humberstone liked half a dozen dishes and a taste of each, and he had made Sally feel it was rather like a peasant not to do likewise. So she was beginning deliberately to waste half her food and drink a glass of wine with her entrée.

"You know, Rex," she said as they came to their dessert, "I'm terribly behind with my art work — I'm afraid I don't do anything but think about you." Despite her brave protests Sally did have twinges of conscience.

"Hurrah for Rex! I didn't think I could amount to that much," he saluted her gracefully. "Don't be a grub — your sister is grub enough from what you tell me. Just be your lovely self — you were born for pleasure."

"Yes, only ——" she began.

"Only? Your father's business wobbly? Never mind. I order eight dozen menu cards at eight dollars a dozen. I'm going to send them to the Old Ladies' Home ——"

"No, that isn't fair!" Sally blushed. "I didn't mean to have you say that — only I must do my part."

"Perhaps you'll have some orders for light stuff that won't take much time."

Humberstone frowned; he was always bored when anyone began to face realities and discuss them or try to live up to them. He did not want Sally to work — merely to play for his amusement and at his bidding."

"Do you really think my work is good?" she said anxiously. "You have seen so much work that is splendid."

"How can I tell when I like Sally better than all the paintings in Europe? Of course it is good — but don't strain your eyes. A woman who wears glasses is unendurable."

Sally was silent. At rock bottom Sally had both loyalty and common sense, occasionally these asserted themselves, only to be pushed aside by this new hypnotic person who seemed to make her an abject slave wishing to do only his will. She was wondering what he would say if he knew she did wear glasses when she worked — her mother had wisely seen to that — and that she felt it was only fair she must earn her way, particularly when she was of so little help to her mother, and her father looked more worried each evening.

"Don't have blue butterflies," Humberstone urged. "Tell me something funny."

Inspired by the request Sally obeyed.

Humberstone would not come in when he brought her back; he never came into the flat except for a scant moment when he waited for Sally to take her away, but more often he sent a cab.

They made an agreement about to-morrow's engage-

ment, and then Sally went wearily up the stairs. She felt a strange sense of fatigue after she had been in his company, he seemed unconsciously to draw on her reserve supply of energy.

She found her mother and Dean Laddbarry and Kenneth playing a game for the latter's benefit. Her mother merely glanced at her, but Sally read her disapproval.

Dean jumped up and held out his hand. "You can't say I'm not to see your mother and Ken," he laughed good-naturedly. "Besides, I've some news — I'm expecting really to go West soon. Isn't that good?"

"Very," she answered coolly. "I had a wonderful drive with Mr. Humberstone — oh, don't stop the game, please — we went fifty miles and had dinner at an inn. Did you get my note, mother?"

"Yes." Densie did not look at her again. "Come, Ken, it's bedtime. Before you go, Dean, I'll give you those clippings."

There was a sympathy and comradeship between the two which even Sally in her present state of distraction admired. She wondered with a sudden little fury if they had dared to talk about her. Dean seemed uncouth and idiotic with his rough clothes and everlastingly goody-goody chatter.

When she was alone with him she said, "I don't want you to come to see me any more. I am — practically — engaged."

"To that cad?" asked the boy roughly. "Well, I'm mighty sorry."

"Why, how dare you!" Sally stamped her little foot. "How dare you!"

"Because I love you and always will. Because he's not the sort for you. Your mother thinks so too."

"You've talked about me — two intruders!" Her anger was almost amusing. "Dean, take your hat and go out of this house and never speak to me again!"

"Don't send me off like that," he begged. "Listen, Sally; you're on the wrong track. If he was the right sort I'd never say anything, no matter how hard it was to give you up. But he's not. You'll see it some day. Sally, darling, he's an old man and he's flattered you into believing him a half-god."

"I told you to go." She pointed to the door.

"I'll ask you this — are you really engaged?" he insisted.

"I said almost."

"At his time of life there's no reason for him to lose another twenty-four hours. He's old enough to know his mind. If he hasn't asked you to marry him clean cut, you ought not to go out with him as you do. Nice girls don't!"

"So — I'm not a nice girl?"

"You are, Sally, but you won't stay so — you'll be like all those painted-up dolls at the hotels — just tagging along. I'm not altogether an idiot."

"Because of our very old friendship, I do forgive you," she said presently; "and if you love me so much I suppose it hurts to know I shall belong to someone else," she finally conceded; "but I'd rather you never talked to me again."

He looked at her for a long hard moment. Then he said: "Is there no use waiting, Sally — sure you won't change?"

"Positive — and I am quite sure Mr. Humberstone is not what you and mother would like to infer. Daddy doesn't think so."

Dean started to reply, then he thought better of it.

"If you ever do change, Sally — I'm about as usual," was all he told her.

The next morning Sally informed her mother that she had dismissed Dean, and refused to hear anything in his defense. The same day she received an order for three dozen menu cards for a Mrs. Hester Smith — alias Rex Humberstone — which perked up her spirits considerably. On the strength of this she bought a new hat. Humberstone had felt it was the way to prevent Sally's becoming serious. He loathed anything serious. Growing old was serious — his forty-five years seemed goblins that came and sat all about his bed nights and haunted him. Some of the goblins were wicked and undesirable; others, far back in the calendar, the mediocre sort; and the present goblins, the last five years, faded neurotic sort of things, hinting of future desolateness unless he wooed and won youth. Sally was youth!

But as to marrying Sally — that would be too grave an undertaking. He did not fancy Densie as a mother-in-law. Marriage was for the young and palship for the old. Things were quite comfortable as they were. Sally was beautiful and had plenty of leisure time. Her friendship with him would teach her how to pick a rich husband at thirty. By the time Sally was thirty Humberstone felt with a gruesome shiver that he could no longer keep up the pace, he would turn to sanitariums and breakfast gruels as his final setting.

But for the present he must have Sally — and keep sending orders for menu cards from this rich and ever-entertaining Hester Smith and her friends, because that would keep Sally under the belief that the world clamored for her work — and she, too, would be contented as she was!

XV

One fall night John came home with disturbing news. The house of Plummer & Plummer was sold — or rather absorbed by a grocery syndicate that operated from coast to coast and north to south on very different lines. John had been negotiating for the deal for sometime, he admitted. It was the only way he could save himself. This new syndicate, The Golden Rule Tea Store, operated on the plan that if they sold sugar and coffee and tea at reduced prices and of inferior quality they could sell staples and canned goods at advanced prices and give those abominable prize coupons with each purchase, enabling the owner of a hundred dollars' worth to possess a large beflowered lamp or a cracker jar with German-silver handles.

Plummer & Plummer had long been a goal in their minds — the syndicate foresaw its ruin in the present-day system of commerce, and after John had delayed several weeks, due to Sam Hippler's urging, he surrendered unconditionally.

John received a lump sum for his stock and good will; this went to pay debts. They bought the warehouse and were to remodel it rapidly into a shiny red-and-gold-fronted place with a few bushels of dried apricots in the window and a sign: "Win ten dollars! Count these and guess the number!" They would sell oleomargarine and substitutes for coffee, diluted extracts, all manner of semi-prepared foods. John was to manage the store at a fair salary.

"At least I'll know where I'm at," he declared.

Densie felt stunned. "And Sam Hippler?"

"Sorry, but he's out of it — a tottering old chap, not available for even a clerk. You know, Densie, a man has his day, and that is all there is to it."

"I can't feel right about it — Plummer & Plummer failed."

"Not failed — sold — absorbed — by this Golden Rule corporation. I shall have a chance to buy stock in it and we can finally get ahead of the game."

"I suppose it had to come," she admitted.

"I'm going on the road to study the other stores and buy for them — they wanted someone with experience. I think we've hit on a big thing and I'm going to give up politics and clubs and devote myself to the syndicate."

"It seems too bad, doesn't it?"

"You sentimental goose!" John was in high spirits. He came over to kiss her. "Now, Densie, have all the clubs you like, and new clothes, and stop worrying about Sally — the child is all right. Rex isn't a half-bad sort."

"John, I can't help but worry — everyone tells me it is not right. As her father you ought to talk to him — ask him his intentions."

John frowned. "We don't do that sort of thing nowadays — and Sally seems able to forge for herself. She's so pretty no one can resist her. Besides," he added sincerely, "she is your daughter and she could not go far wrong."

Densie blushed. "Thank you, dear, but I want to see her settled. I'm resigned to Harriet — I dare say in modern fashion she will be most useful. But if Sally does not decide about marriage or a career she will be marking time."

"She is a mere infant. Girls stay girls nowadays as long as they like," John protested.

"You feel I'm too narrow." Densie was very earnest. "I want to be fair — but I would have been glad to have Sally and Dean tell us what we told our uncle and aunt."

"Dean is a good lad, but Sally was never meant for a poor man's wife!"

"Do you know anything about Humberstone?" Densie was loath to give up her first impressions.

"Everyone speaks well of him," was all John could say. "I suppose we shall know about him by and by."

He fell to talking about the businesss change and Sam Hippler's little tragedy of no longer being useful.

"But it's the new order," he told Densie that night. They seemed to grow close again as they talked. "The new era — you called it. Come, Densie, let us hurry and be one with it." He spoke lightly but he meant the words.

Sam Hippler came to see Densie before he went to a great-niece in New England who offered him a home. He was far from penniless, that was not his sorrow — it was the facts that he was out of the running and that Plummer & Plummer was no more.

"I'm so sorry," Densie said tenderly; "if we were in the old home you should never go away. Uncle Herbert and Aunt Sally would have wanted you to stay with us."

"Ah, but I'd be in the way." He blew his nose forcibly with the old-style red-bordered handkerchief. "John has had hard work to put up with me for years — I can't change, Densie; I'm too old to learn how to do things the new way. It was hard on John too. John knows how to do things the new way."

"Don't you approve of the new way?" said John's wife.

"Well, this eternal efficiency is deadly if you carry it

too far. It destroys spontaneity," the old man said with surprising clearness of mind. "And these modern children!" He held his gnarled old hands up in horror, an antique cameo ring almost slipping from one of his fingers he had grown so thin. "I give you my word I can't understand things. I finish reading the ads in a woman's magazine with the morals of a bushman. Where's the old Godey's and Harpers'— wasn't that enough to satisfy?"

"They don't want that sort of thing now, Uncle Sam."

"These — these steel-colored boots and dresses without waists — bah, I've no patience with the young women! And the young men — weaklings!" He dropped his gray head.

"It was not I who wanted the firm to go under," Densie said presently.

"No; you're your aunt over again. It was never you, but John; he is mad with the spirit of the age!" He glanced up at Densie between his shaggy brows. "It's no longer —'how much can we all save, but how much can we all spend!' My girl, unless you catch up with him — your heart is going to ache!"

"I know, Uncle Sam — I'm trying. But it is always household cares — cares — cares and the children. And now the children seem farther away than ever. I was trying to be modern when I left the Little House — and it has only resulted in my being old-fashioned in a new-fashioned setting, which is worse than ever. I'm going to try again." She was thinking of a way to earn some money, a drastic way that would bring the desired result.

"After you catch the spirit of the age," the old man dreamed, "you'll long for the past. . . . The day the firm was sold was your uncle's wedding day. I remember when he and Sally went away — a stagecoach then,

and she wore a pink striped silk and a bonnet with white ties. They went to the Orient and left me in charge — I was quite modern then! The day they came home — eight months later, we planted a rosebush before the front door of The Evergreens — for good fortune. I can see Sally now as she scolded me for bending the trowel ——"

Densie rose abruptly. Something sobbed way inside of her; she wanted to take this old man into her keeping and reverence him, not for what he could do according to modern calculation, but for what he had done!

"Do you remember how you used to sit on your uncle's lap when you had the earache?" he asked with a childish veering of topics.

"And how John used to skip school and you forged his excuses?"

So they talked half the afternoon — all in the past tense until Kenneth came in to bring them into the present.

Densie gave Sam Hippler his choice of the old books and pictures and an armchair Uncle Herbert had particularly named as his own.

"My room at Nancy's will seem like home," the old chap said cheerfully. "I'm robbing you, though."

"No, no! The family always call them eyesores. Only I could not set them out for a secondhand man. Take all you want — I like to think of you as having them."

When the family discovered what she had done they applauded the act and said it was too bad she had not sold off everything else that was an antique.

The parting between John and Sam Hippler was a trifle strained for the former. He had been impatient with the old man's domineering persistency and high ideals for a long time, and doubly impatient with the

fact that he had to take the trouble and time to deceive him — whereas he, proprietor, should have merely given orders and had them obeyed without questioning.

"Good-by, my boy. You've a good wife — that is better than a good business," was all Sam Hippler said, to his relief.

After Sam Hippler's departure John prepared for his first long trip on the road. He had a word with Sally to ease his conscience concerning Rex Humberstone, but as usual Sally ended the victor.

"Daddy, how can you say I'm flirting! When I adore Rex and he does me — he merely wants me to be sure of my own mind. Besides, look at the money I earned last month — you can't scold me — you with a brand-new business and the prospect of being dreadfully rich."

She kissed him on the forehead and rumpled up his hair, and he ended weakly by promising to bring her skates from New York!

XVI

It was after Harriet graduated and decided to live with Leila in New York, Leila being a minor librarian somewhere in the Harlem district, that Densie began to earn her own money.

She had not gone to see her daughter graduate because of preparing for this new and very satisfying interest. John had run down, combining it with business as well, and reported that there had been no exercises to speak of and that Harriet was just the same, a trifle more reserved if anything. Everyone spoke of her in the highest terms and she was exceptionally advanced to have so excellent an appointment.

The chance to earn the money had come to Densie rather unexpectedly. One of the clubs of which she had been a struggling member regretted the fact that no woman's exchange was established in the city, that if there were they would be able to place the members' handiwork for sale and secure funds for a permanent library and other things.

It gave Densie the idea. Why not start a woman's exchange? Why not do some useful thing? If she was no longer essential to her family she would make herself essential to something — the maternal in her demanded such a vent.

She did not confide in anyone, but went quietly to work to select a small front-windowed shop in a fair section of the city and figure on the estimates for fitting it up correctly. She had fair ideas regarding this — a sooth-

ing gray-green effect. She put a gold-lettered sign in the window: Woman's Exchange Tea Room.

She was amazed at her own boldness. Instinctively she hesitated before she plunged any further, so she confessed to Sally, who regarded the idea as utterly impossible. It was unlike mummy to have ideas outside of her home.

"How can you run an exchange?" she demanded. "You don't know anything about business."

"Then I can learn," her mother answered, to her amazement.

'It does not look very well for father to have you with a tea room." But Sally really meant Rex Humberstone. She dreaded telling him — he was so extremely aristocratic in his views.

When John returned from his trip Densie's little exchange had made its initial bow to the world. She had a few wicker tables for the light refreshments; she had hunted out some faded women in need of pin money, but trained for nothing but their home, and engaged them to make cakes and jams and sandwiches; she accepted crochet work from the inmates of the wheel-chair guilds and old people's homes; she had beautifully knitted afghans and sweaters made by various grandmas and great-grandmas who spent most of their time in their rooms; she had slippers, shoe bags, baby-carriage sets, perfumes and sachets — all manner of dainty homemade things. She took orders for cakes and preserves, she had maple-sugar patties and an odd sort of pottery. It was really quite a little shop.

She had Sally's hand-painted favors and menu cards in the front case and told her to make Christmas and Easter greetings, and she pressed Kenneth into service as an errand boy and sweeper up.

Kenneth enjoyed the exchange, since he ate up all the left-over sandwiches and ice creams and had the rare joy of being with his mother more than ever before.

Densie secured help so she could be away some of the time; her affiliations with her clubs were to help her. Densie, too, was learning how to use people in a quiet, refined way! But Densie herself remained unchanged, in a demure gray dress and frilly white apron and her hair combed back unfashionably, no hint of powder on her flushed little face.

Sprays of artificial wistaria and cherry blossoms decorated the shop and a gong of temple bells rang as one entered. Handmade toys sat in a row as the receiving line — dolls made from Turkish towels and dogs from stockings and funny gray kitties cut from outing flannel and fantastically cross-stitched.

At first John had nothing to say — it so astonished him that Densie would dare do such a thing, particularly without consulting him. He did not know whether or not to be pleased. It evidently meant that she would need less of his money, which was an excellent happening, because he had more wildcat schemes to make money from mines or fly-by-night ventures. It did not look quite well, which annoyed him — and yet many modern women were beginning to earn money, and as Densie had no special talent it was only natural that she turn to the aiding and abetting of other people's talents — homekeeper to the woman's exchange as it were.

So he said, "Well, well, I've a rival! You are quite a surprise box. How long has this been back in your head?"

"For months I've wanted to do something — it seemed to me we had nothing that took up our time together as we used to have, and a woman grows tired of

going out alone. Sally is absorbed with Rex, and Kenneth a youngster. I thought it was really a needed thing and that it was a duty as well as a pleasure."

"Do you like it?"

"Ever so much. I enjoy meeting the different people and to help all the queer old dears who could not possibly earn new boots unless I managed to sell their knick-knacks. It is a great pleasure, John."

"I suppose you'll not be home very much," he ruminated. Somehow the venture in other lights was not so favorable.

"Not as much, of course — I leave early in the morning, but I plan to have the girl close the store for me. I must be here to cook dinner."

"Um — if it's too much for you let me know," he said magnanimously, nonplused by the procedure, and the motive behind it!

He wondered if anyone would speak to him about it, ask if he had had losses and say it was too bad Mrs. Plummer had opened an exchange. But no one mentioned it — what people thought was their own concern. The exchange flourished surprisingly well. Partly because it was conscientiously managed and partly because Densie unearthed things that customers said they were longing and looking for but could never find.

Women exclaimed with tears and laughs over certain old patterns in cross-stitch and crewelwork, and when Densie had fat little pots of rose-leaf jam for sale she could not supply the demand. There was an air of sincerity about the shop — everything was homemade and no pains were spared to keep it spotlessly spick-and-span, a scent of lavender and lemon verbena pervading it.

Densie disposed of everything quickly except Sally's

hand-painted trifles. They seemed out of place beside the homey, almost wudgy articles. Her tea room became a rendezvous for shoppers. Even business men dropped in for an " honest-to-goodness brownbread sandwich and a cup of real coffee," and Densie found after three months that she had cleared her initial expenses and had a hundred and fifty dollars of her own money — her own money! — which she had earned.

It seemed to her on the day she counted it over and realized what she had done that she began to catch up with the younger generation. She advertised the shop and invited a mail-order business for a few odd novelties. A woman in Louisiana asked if she would handle paper-shelled almonds, which she did; while someone else sent praline patties, and a third, from Canada, contributed birch-bark baskets and sweetgrass work. Two California girls ventured to send her Indian dolls, canoes and abalone jewelry.

Densie was not happy except as she made herself be happy from the fact of success with its inevitable stimulus and excitement and the thought that she was essential once more. She ceased being a type and became an individual. But she used to wish for the old days when she rose to start the fire in the Little House, to find John had started it and put the kettle on, and she would make hot cakes and bring out maple syrup as a reward! And there had been more reward breakfasts than any other kind as she recalled it. She liked the nice, even, middle-class way in which they had lived and mingled with their neighbors, that feeling of security when the Baxters wanted to borrow anything, from the flatirons to the baby; or the right to run into Grandma McDermott's on the corner when anything went wrong or if she wanted a new pudding recipe.

John used to know his men neighbors as well; they used to water their lawns summer evenings while the children tumbled about and the women called to each other from the verandas about the price of calico, and the men would compare lawns and gardens, confide fishing secrets and exchange opinions on the topics of the day. And it was all a restful sane sort of existence. But this was no more. The flat dwellers tried to hoist the burden of caring for lawns on each other, and the women knew their neighbors only to gossip about them and nod very formally. The other scheme of life where irregularly planted fragrant gardens and real dogs and old-time hired girls and orthodox churchgoing and Saturday baths — had vanished.

Densie had the rarest joy in the world when she came across women similarly circumstanced as she was — born at the closing of one era and trying desperately to understand and heed the dictates of the new. She used to buy their work and encourage them to join clubs and to relax in matters of orthodox religion — to do as that old article had told her, the one she had read many years ago which urged the middle-aged American woman to become acquainted with the joy of living! Densie, too, was beginning to say with her daughters, "First of all I am a human being and must live my own life."

She found it impossible to tend to the exchange and her clubs and her flat. Kenneth was with her much of the time, but to provide for Sally and John was impossible. So she hired a maid, a careless, inefficient Scandinavian, who did as she liked pretty much, and occasionally took week-ends off to become hilariously intoxicated.

"It is the best I can do," Densie told John when he began to complain about the food. "Either I must stay at home or else I must have help. Sally will not do the

work — she ought to, because she does nothing else — but she won't. Perhaps you can talk to her — I have tried and despaired."

"We want to know, your mother and I," said John, accosting Sally a few days later, "whether you are going to marry Humberstone or do your part here as you should? Your mother cannot sacrifice a good business and you don't seem inclined to help. It is time he spoke about his intentions."

Sally, quite as beautiful as before, but older and more cynical of expression, thrummed idly at the bass notes of the old piano. "Well, father, I claim the same rights as Harriet. You never ask her things."

"Because she does them. You don't."

Sally pouted. "Why do you think Rex is or is not going to marry me?"

"I don't know — a year or so ago I thought he would marry you as fast as you would have him, but he is taking his time about it. Men didn't in my day; they never 'waited' on a young woman unless they had declared themselves."

John began to feel abused — after all it was not his place to be staying home in the morning to lecture his daughter and try to regulate the household. It was Densie's — and he had an aversion to going into her exchange for luncheon because of being called "only her husband!"

Densie was quite a stranger to him except for the brief time in the evening. But he noticed she seemed happier and more enthusiastic about things generally, and when he had asked almost shyly what she intended doing with her profit, she said she was going to bank it and not risk speculation. John disapproved of this; he felt no money should lie idle in a bank. Uncle Herbert's dreaminess

had resolved itself into a desire to gamble in John's disposition.

"I can't walk up to Rex Humberstone and ask him if he is going to marry me," Sally said angrily. "I'm tired of everyone — I wish I were in New York with Harriet." She put her head down and began to cry.

John stood back utterly nonplused. "I say, Sally, don't be a goose — what's the matter anyway?"

He stared about the living room in dismay; there was dust on every article of furniture, and the things did not fit into the room, the new-fashioned things were too expensive and the old-fashioned ones too laughable. The dining room was disorderly and the breakfast dishes still about.

He thought of the contrast with Densie's exchange, spick-and-span, with Densie in her Quakerish costume moving deftly about, knowing just where to put this or how to fix that and where to put a stitch in an article to safeguard its durability, and that a fat bow of ribbon about the bunny's neck would make him twice as attractive! He felt neglected as he glanced over at himself in the mantel.

"What a funny fellow I am," he murmured half out loud. "I feel like twenty-five and I'm nearly forty-five. I don't want Densie in her shop, and I'm dashed if she didn't make me nervous when she stayed home to drudge — I don't believe I was meant to be head of a family."

Curiously he almost envied Rex Humberstone and Harriet, two of the freest individuals he knew.

Sally stopped crying and raised her head to catch her father's expression.

"I'll go away if you like, but I won't stay home and do housework. Mother could sell my things if she tried — other things have sold."

And she began wondering why there were no more orders from the mysterious Mrs. Hester Smith. "Mother ought to stay home — she has had her day."

John shrugged his shoulders. "Squabble all you like, my dears. I declare myself out of it."

And putting on his hat he made for downtown. Before he reached his store he saw Kenneth loaded with boxes, all labeled Woman's Exchange and Tea Room, Mrs. Densie Plummer, Proprietor. Kenneth was very dignified and filled with his own importance.

"Where are you off to?" John halted him with a flourishing salute.

"Mother's got a lot of orders. Somebody's getting married, and there is a new baby at Alice Palmer's. Gee, you ought to see the pink bows! And there is a party cake for somebody else."

Kenneth was happy. Densie paid him a percentage of each article's value which he delivered. He too was saving his pennies.

"When is mother coming home?" John asked, surprised to find himself more and more indignant at being neglected.

"Oh, she's going to a banquet to-night — a club banquet; and I'm going to eat up all the things at the tea room and she'll call for me at half-past nine."

"I don't want you hanging round the store until then. You come home and eat your supper." John was ashamed of himself as he spoke.

"There won't be any supper, will there? Sally's never home." Kenneth was gaining in independence. "Anyway, I'll do what mummy said."

Which ended the argument.

Aghast even at Kenneth, John let him pass on.

XVII

On the night of Mrs. Plummer's club banquet John ent home for supper, partly because he really enjoyed eing a martyr, as he had once accused Densie of being, or he knew there would be none. He waited patiently hile the Scandinavian handmaiden laid some weird con-oction at his plate.

Miss Sally was out with her friend, he was told upon nquiry. And gulping down boiled green tea and a little ish of sauce John rummaged in the living room to find omething to read, something to make him forget every-ning — Sally and her mysterious Rex, the shop, Ken-eth, Harriet, and the Golden Rule Syndicate, whose ethods jarred and irritated him, though he felt he must tay at the post now that the die was cast.

Densie came home with Kenneth in a cab — another tep in advance. She wore a gray silk dress and real iolets, and she looked quite pretty as she stood pulling ff her gloves and saying: "Well, John, did you get nough to eat? Kenneth gorged on chocolate cake and nayonnaise and I must not let it happen again. Do you emember the time you were 'dying' in the woodshed nd we interrupted Aunt Sally's whist club?"

"Yes, I remember; and those were pretty good times oo." He was a bit sulky, for he was mentally adding, 'Aunt Sally had no shop."

"We had a pleasant time to-night." She tossed him a rogram. "I heard nice things said about the ex-hange."

"Do you think you ought to keep it?" He did not glance at the program. "Don't I provide for you?"

"With food and fuel and a roof — yes." She had prepared for this moment long ago. "But your life lies away from mine, and so of necessity mine must lie away from yours or else I should become a burden. I am necessary only to my boy, and I have him with me. I don't mean, my dear, that you have stopped caring," she added impulsively, "only that you care in a modern fashion. That is the best way to express it. I know you wonder why I fuss and work so hard in the shop — it is because someone appreciates it. I've been so weary of having meal after meal stand untouched or tasted — or hastily gobbled without comment. So tired of staying home night after night, and when you returned of not daring to ask you questions. Isn't it strange, John, how we are always courteous to the passer-by and rude to the ones of our household? If the children wanted me here — to keep the home as I was taught, I should never have looked further. But I never really pleased you — so I set to work to please someone else. Not a bad arrangement, is it?"

"I did not say you did not please us," he retorted.

"Ah, but you acted it."

She left him abruptly, without their customary good-night kiss.

Meanwhile Sally and Rex had come to a distinct rift in their affair. Sally was beginning to understand the awful terror of doubts — for the first time in the two years of knowing Rex she was learning that it was selfishness which made him anxious to have her happy, it disturbed him if she was not in high feather and he therefore saw to it that she was.

She was beginning to see, dimly as yet, the truth of the

prophecy, "a time waster"— and when she met Dean Laddbarry and he begged to come to see her or go with him to some jolly informal place, she refused from a stubborn sense of pride. The glitter and sparkle of hotels and expensive restaurants, motors, roadside inns, theater after theater and dances palled on her. She felt as if she had long had a diet of bonbons and cream puffs and wished for some sweet crust of bread.

Sally was only surface shallow; underneath was of the same quality and loyalty of heart as Densie. But Rex saw only this shallowness, or rather he preferred to see no further. By staying light-hearted and frivolous one remained young, he had made himself believe. Besides, if he ever went to imagining the past in all its realities he would become a wreck, so he trespassed on only the lightest layers of his scarred self and influenced Sally to do likewise.

Sometimes Sally became a bit of a bore; her extreme youth, which was her great asset, was also tactless and too frank. Her moods were like an April day, and even though she cried prettily and did not sniffle he felt as if he had undertaken the direction of a day nursery rather than a stimulating young fay!

At first Densie had protested against his beautiful gifts to Sally, but it did no good. So she bided her time and said nothing. Indeed she rarely saw the man unless for a curt good evening; he regarded her as someone with impossible ideas and manners and treated her accordingly. Rex despised manual work of any sort; it was he who had made Sally lazy; originally Sally was not at fault, but Rex knew how to ridicule in a peculiar stinging fashion whenever she suggested that she really work, and when she told him of some very idle, useless day spent in prinking or buying nonsense or reading an entertaining

story which she would retell to him, he would always give her the impression that she was the very acme of common sense, and gradually this latter way of spending her days became a fixed habit.

But the greatest harm Rex had done Sally was to teach her to be untruthful! It often so happens. He had caused her to magnify her wrongs and her abilities unconsciously. His life, highly colored from fast living, made her own seem drab and colorless. To keep his interest top hole, as well as to satisfy her romantic little self, Sally began to magnify certain happenings. Dean became a jealous monster who had almost kidnapped her, and other young men whom she casually met and enjoyed herself with for an evening suddenly assumed the proportions of terrifying and frantic rivals who badgered her with mysterious letters and telephones, and sent her expensive presents which she promptly returned.

Sally knew this was wrong, but no one but herself was held accountable for it, she argued, and it amused Rex! She loved this older man with a terrible sort of infatuation. He could not do wrong. He was absolute in all he said or told her to say or do. There was no one else in the world but Rex Humberstone. She used to lie awake consumed with jealousy because of other women he had casually mentioned as having been in his life, and terrifying doubts as to her ability to hold him. Very skillfully had Rex made the shadow seem the substance!

This was the main reason why Sally deliberately fabricated about her charms — a strained ruse and eventually a useless one; but all women try it at some time or other in some way. Little Sally, who had never had so much as a proposal from anyone save Dean — and then in boy-and-girl fashion — began to invent romances concerning herself, to pretend to be almost swayed toward

this one and that one, and would end by graciously telling Rex she really liked him best of all! Rex saw through the game, but it amused him and told him how much the girl had come to care for him, so he listened politely and let her believe he trembled lest she turn from him to accept one of these out-of-town Chesterfields who seemed to spend their days and nights writing Sally Plummer threatening love letters and tragic appeals.

Nor was this untruth confined to the romantic side alone, it crept like an ugly little thread into the beautiful pattern of Sally's soul and showed unexpectedly in all she did. Sally could not be accurate about anything, she was not truthful with herself, she could not look things in the face and acknowledge facts. She rouged and used an eyebrow pencil and let Rex buy her a handsome fur coat, which she told her mother glibly she had earned. Densie knew it was not true, but she could not have made Sally give it back — so she let it pass as if she credited the story.

Her boy-and-girl friends dropped away. Sally was never home, Mrs. Plummer was never home, and besides, Sally knew that funny man, lots older —" he takes her to hotels like an actress "— and that funny man would never have gone for a hayrack ride or a simple dance or a ghost party. They knew better than to ask him, so Sally went no place except with that funny man, and Dean concluded that she really was engaged and let the matter rest.

Several months after Densie's shop was acknowledged to be successful Sally had her first quarrel with Rex, in which she lost far more than the issue involved. It was Thanksgiving week and Densie was unusually rushed with orders for homemade pumpkin pies. She and Kenneth scarcely came home at all. John wandered between

the club and the house in an undignified state of mind, and Sally, who was supposed to be housekeeper, let the Scandinavian handmaiden have her own way while she finished a turquoise satin dancing frock and a black velvet cape which had ermine for a collar. She was going with Rex to a fashionable concert and supper party afterward, and she wanted to look unusually enticing. She was concocting another dream romance to make him more than ardent and was just completing the details to her satisfaction when the bell rang and she answered it, to find him, to her great surprise, standing there dressed in his usual exquisite fashion.

Sally crimsoned with mortification. She wore a pink lawn dress, pretty enough in its way but a trifle rumpled, and her hair was carelessly tossed on top of her head. Rex had never seen her this way; she would have given worlds to have not had it come about.

"What brings you here?" she began gayly, attempting to carry off the situation. "I'm just finishing my frock — want to see it? Everything is very dusty, I'm afraid. You don't mind, do you? You see, mummy is rushed to death and I'd rather sew than sweep. Sit down here." She was quite ill at ease.

Somehow the moment Rex entered her home the place became dwarfed and shabby in appearance; he had that power of making Sally see it through his eyes.

"I just ran up to beg someone's pardon." He dropped a corsage of violets in her lap. "Sally, I'm going away over Thanksgiving — a business deal in New York; and so we'll have to postpone our engagement. We'll have a carnival to make up for it as soon as I'm back."

Sally's lips quivered. "I won't have any Thanksgiving without you," she said slowly. A ponderous family

dinner would be a bore, and she would have no excuse to go away. Densie had said she would have Maude Hatton and Lucy Parks over and that she was going to cook the turkey her own self.

"I know, my dear, but if it is business ——"

Sally began to cry.

"Come, come, don't be childish!" he urged, at a loss for words. "I've not been out of town since we first knew each other. I should think you would be tired of me."

Her temper rose to the surface. "I want to know what you are going to do about me," she cried; "we've known each other quite long enough, haven't we?"

"Do about you?" The mocking eyes seemed to dance, the mouth took on an ugly twist.

"You know what I mean — what are you going to — to ——"

"Well?" He was not going to help her.

"Oh, Rex, don't make it so hard. Everyone is beginning to wonder about it, we've known each other so long, and ——"

It was difficult for Sally, and yet her childish jealous heart seemed stabbed at the mere thought of his leaving town for the holiday on which she had set such store for weeks.

"Say it all, Sally, and don't be too long about it. I haven't time to waste on weeps ——"

"Are you going to marry me?" Sally's eyes flashed with a spark of her great-aunt's determined spirit.

"What an idea! Must I ask you that, Sally, in order to know you at all?"

"Girls are not supposed to know men so much older than themselves unless they are engaged," Sally answered weakly. She wished for her mother very much.

"In this day and age we don't have to be engaged to every woman we know, do we?"

He came to sit on the arm of her chair. Sally noticed how many small lines were in his face. The afternoon sunlight was quite merciless. She began to feel ashamed and bewildered.

"Where is the harm," he was saying, "of being pals — comrades? Come, Sally, I know how deadly marriage is. Take your own home for example — have your parents kept their romance? You have told me not yourself. Look about you — what married people have? I could never see marriage as the goal for happiness! Besides, you are only a child ——"

Tears rolled down her cheeks. "Ah, but I love you," she said simply.

He looked at her critically. She was so young and lovely — and it would be rather strenuous to have to find someone else equally young and lovely who would please and adore him as Sally did.

"Listen, my child"— he stroked her hand gently — "you are too young to marry. To-day women marry at thirty-five far more than at twenty. And a jolly good thing too. You don't know whether you would want to marry me — you can't be sure yet. You've ability in many lines, and I would not feel right to gobble you up without your first having a chance to mature properly."

"I'd rather belong to you," said Sally miserably. Once in the situation she was determined to see it through.

"I'd be proud and happy to have you, but I'm not a domestic sort," he assured her. "I love you, Sally. There — stop crying! You're a darling infant and I want you for my pal as long as you want me. But I don't — flatter myself," he added cleverly, "that I could hope

really to win you. Just let me stay pal as long as there is no one else, will you, dear?"

She kept on sobbing. Then Rex bent and kissed her. He had never taken liberties with Sally before. His attitude toward the girl was a cold-blooded one of personal delight in her society. Besides, no one else would believe in him as Sally did — he had not the same influence over older, more sophisticated women.

She sprang up.

"You must not kiss me unless we are to be married, please — please." She went to the mantel and put her head down as she cried.

Rex frowned. "I've pulled a hornets' nest about my ears," he said half jokingly. "Come, Sally, don't cry! Buck up and have a good time Thanksgiving. Give an absent chap a thought — there's the girl. I love you for my pal and I will never have another."

"But it isn't right; I want to be right or not at all." She began to be hysterical.

"It is a man's place to ask a woman if he wishes her to share his name," Rex said rather sardonically. "Don't lose your dignity; for so young a girl it was one of your chief charms."

She stood facing him, flushed and unlovely. "I will not be your pal, Rex, I love you too much — it will have to be a proper engagement or we cannot know each other."

"Then it is my dismissal?" His copper-colored face was a trifle more copper-colored, the nearest he ever came to a blush.

Sally hesitated. If he went away angry at her, never to see her again, the joy of existence would be gone; it would no longer be fun just to be alive and see what would

happen next! She could not bear it. He had so mesmerized her, distorted her viewpoint and given her a false standard of values that she would be unable to find the way back alone. She could not bear the thought; unconsciously she held out her hands to him.

"No — no," was all she said, drawing in her breath like a frightened child.

An ugly expression had crossed the copper-colored face. "You've no claim on me, Sally," he said a trifle roughly. "A man cannot be humbugged into marrying anyone."

She beat the palms of her hands together sharply. "Is that the way you think of me — humbugging you? Rex, Rex!"

"No, but you don't seem to understand the way of the world. It is not the way of your father and mother, thank fortune, but the modern, independent way, that gives the individual time and circumstance to his own liking. If you insist on my engaging myself to you, Sally — well, I can do only one thing — tell you I am sorry to lose a splendid comrade. But marriage and domesticity are impossible as far as I am concerned."

Sally walked up close to him, her soft red-gold hair standing out like a halo with the afternoon sunlight on it. "If you love someone, you want to belong to them; but if you do not want me there is nothing more to say. You see, I thought all along that you did; you used to joke about it and say things — things like Dean said, only in a nicer way; and I know Dean meant them."

Rex shrugged his shoulders with impatience. He was getting into reality, a thing he pledged himself never to do.

"Think it over, Sally, and when I come back tell me if you want to be my pal. I'll never have another one. Some day, perhaps, I might come to feel different, but for

now — I'm honest, and you know that is always best." His eyes fairly danced as he said this last.

"Are you going away — right away?"

"To-night." He picked up his coat.

Sally bit her under lip. "Very well," she said dully.

She felt humiliated. She had asked someone to marry her! Modern though it was it made her ashamed and she did not want to look at Rex again.

"Good-by, little girl." He held out his hand.

But she shook her head. "I must think about it," was all she would let herself say. An amused look showed in the dancing eyes, but he outwardly accepted his dismissal as if it were from his monarch.

After he left she threw herself across her bed and sobbed, the despairing sobs of a woman — but no one but the Scandinavian handmaiden knew anything about it!

XVIII

Thanksgiving was a wretched affair all the way through. Sally was lackluster and wan, scarcely noticing anyone or answering questions save by a monosyllable, eating but little and moping most of the time in her room.

Densie knew there had been some quarrel with Rex since nothing else would have seriously disturbed Sally. She hoped it might be a permanent disagreement and set to work to clean the flat thoroughly and cook the very best dinner of which she was capable.

Harriet came from New York as a surprise — she felt it her duty — and made the family circle complete. Lucy Parks and Maude Hatton dressed in their rusty best tottered in early in the afternoon to hear all about New York — to Harriet's horror. Harriet had improved rather than not; the period since she had last been at home had been a successful and happy one according to her views, and she had gained in tolerance and poise from contact with different and invigorating minds. But she was even more self-centered than formerly, and was imbued with a quiet egotism not apparent to a casual observer. She wore extreme mannish tailored suits and beautifully made waists to go with them; her hair was allowed to grow again and rather prettily tucked into a knot low on her neck. Densie rejoiced to see the evidences of femininity make their appearance. Harriet had no value of money, though she could tabulate sums for dis-

tributing among the poor and her chart had been used to relieve earthquake sufferers, thereby winning her no small praise.

She brought everyone a handsome present — things of no practical use but in excellent taste. Sally's was a quaint sandalwood box with a key of hammered silver, Kenneth's a set of Chinese stories. Her father was presented with an impossible but artistic shaving mirror, and Densie found some sort of rare green-china plates marked with her monogram. Harriet told her she intended to give her the entire set by degrees.

"It is the best way, mummy," she said gently, "when one has nothing in the way of good china to get a little each time and have it of the best."

Densie meekly accepted the gift. She was pleased with Harriet's change in manner and appearance — though she maintained a formal politeness indicative that she considered herself a guest, first and last, and would conduct herself accordingly.

The difference between the two girls was an interesting one upon which to reflect. Sally stayed at home and made, according to herself, the greater sacrifice. But in a thousand and one small ways she was unbearably trying and nerve-racking. Nevertheless, Sally stayed at home. Harriet had refused to stay home — but once away she was graciousness itself in her small pleasing attentions. Densie wondered which she preferred; she could not have honestly told herself.

As for Sally's moping over her quarrel with Rex, Harriet took a "polite" view of the matter. She ignored it; and generously praised Sally's little daubs of paintings and said she must visit New York and see the galleries. Sally responded to the politeness; she, too, became a polite artificial manikin. Every one kept "bucked

up," as Kenneth said, in front of Harriet — she had a way with her, there was no denying. One could not go into hysterics before her or lose one's temper without a great deal of provocation.

"The Woman's Exchange is very nice, mummy," she told her mother. "Of course, I don't particularly care for that sort of thing — hammered brass stores and Japanese print and old book shops are more to my liking. But I can see that you have made use of being so old-fashioned."

"Sometimes I wonder if I ought to go back to staying at home — but it did not seem as if it mattered, and your father has had such a hard time of it."

"I shall add my bit presently," Harriet offered. "Oh, yes; I can afford to." She relinquished the last hope of possessing a real Japanese print, which she had adored from without the showcase for many moons. "It makes me feel better if I do. You can give it to Sally for pin money."

Harriet returned to New York the day after Thanksgiving. She was sweetly smiling and formally polite until the train pulled out of the shed and she had waved to the group on the platform. Then she gave a sigh of relief. That was done — it would not be necessary for another two years — and two years is a long time in which to be alone and at peace with the world. She took out a notebook and fell to studying — and the home people were erased from her memory as much as the menu for the Thanksgiving dinner! Such was Harriet.

Densie tried to ask Sally about Rex the night after Harriet had left. She felt it was her duty, though Densie had become like a swift lovely river coated over with ice, the real current flowing deeply and in secret.

"I am sorry if you are going to let this man upset you,

Sally. I assure you he is not worth it," she told her younger daughter. "It is not the right way for affairs to progress, and if you have quarreled do make it a definite one and begin again — be mummy's old Sally!" She held out her arms.

Sally shook her head. She was standing looking out at the cold fall night.

"You don't understand," she said slowly. "I made an awful mistake — I said something I never should have said."

And she could not be prevailed upon to say more. Over and over Sally had re-lived that brief good-by between herself and Rex. She felt humiliated and mortified, realizing she had acted in his eyes like a poorly mannered child. She wondered if he would call her up or write her; she wondered how it would seem to have to go on living without Rex Humberstone. How terribly, horribly monotonous life would be — everything would pall and grate on her. She would never be able to pass by the Century Club where he lived without feeling dizzy and faint; she would scream if she ever met him face to face — and the thought of his paying anyone else the same wonderful attentions that had once been hers — Sally's eyes grew black and her nails cut into her rosy little palms.

She lay awake, tossing restlessly and wondering what was best to do — whether or not she should make an advance to him. She knew it was wrong, she ought to wait and let him speak. Had he returned? Was he utterly disgusted with her childish lack of self-control? Men did not like to have women throw themselves at their heads — and she had thrown herself at Rex in undeniable fashion. She could not take back those words. She hated herself. Then she began to analyze how it

had come about, just what had made her love him so dearly? Why did she feel dependent on him for the joy of existence? Why did she feel ashamed of her mother — even of her father — and her home when Rex was about? What baffling, uncanny power did he possess? She sat up in bed; finally she rose and walked up and down the floor of her room, her hands clenched together. Moonlight stole in, to show her the edge of the unworn turquoise dancing frock which hung in the press; it maddened her. She felt a rejected, despised spinster whose few pretty possessions were only wasted ammunition! She shut the door of the press abruptly and continued her walk.

Why not telephone the Century Club and ask if he had returned? She paused, horrified at the thought. It was half past twelve. Would her mother and father hear her? She could not sleep unless she knew whether he was back or not — and she must sleep. She could call up quietly and just be sure. Supposing he was back and had not telephoned her! Well, better she knew the worst. She slipped into the living room and closed the door; the ticking of the old-fashioned clock seemed to reprove her action. Almost in a whisper she called the Century Club and after a long wait the night man answered.

"Is Mr. Humberstone in town?" Her hands trembled so she could hardly hold the receiver.

"Yes, ma'am — just a minute," the porter answered, and before Sally could stop him someone had lifted the receiver hook and was saying in the familiar drawl: "Well — what's wanted?"

It was Rex.

Sally's voice deserted her; every drop of blood in her

body seemed to rush to her forehead and cause trip-hammer pulses to beat rhythmically.

"Hello — hello there," he kept saying.

"Rex!" she finally answered.

"Who is it? It isn't — not — not Sally?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you think you're doing up at this hour?" He was pleased she had called him.

"I wanted to know if you were home." She was too wretched to pretend. "It worried me — that is all."

"I came in to-night, but I did not phone you because I thought you might be having guests or be out. How have you been?"

He was enjoying the victory, and he proposed to make Sally surrender unconditionally.

"I had a miserable holiday. I wasn't well. My sister came from New York and we had a sort of family dinner — I guess you would call it that, but I wasn't very keen about it." She tried to laugh.

"I'm glad you didn't like it as well as if you and I had our dinner," he assured tenderly.

Sally's heart beat happily once more.

"Are you?" was all she said.

"When can I see you? Let's have dinner to-morrow night at the Raleigh — then do something afterward. I want to give you something pretty."

"All right," she said meekly. "What time?"

"I'll send for you at seven. Now scamper to bed. I'm quite set up to think you called me. But it's two to one you just tumbled in from a party and your conscience rebuked you!" He was the old bantering Rex again.

"No, no! Truly, I haven't done anything to-day except wish for you — and wish I had not been so silly."

"You're never silly, dear — just an intense little girl. Good night, until to-morrow."

Sally turned away from the phone. Her mother was standing in the doorway.

"My dear, what was the matter?"

Sally burst into tears — the tension had snapped.

"I had been rude to Rex; he went away and I was afraid he was angry and would never want to see me again. I love him. I cannot help it. It is more to me to have his friendship than anything in this world or the next. I know it was not proper to call him, but I couldn't sleep. Mother, don't be cross. You know what it means to love someone else better than yourself, don't you?" She clung to her mother piteously.

Densie shook her head. "Poor Sally," was all she said; "I'm afraid it is going to be very hard!"

The next night at dinner Rex gave Sally a jeweler's ring box, which she opened with tremulous delight. A beautiful two-carat diamond was inside, set in platinum. Sally's eyes matched it for brightness.

"Is it for — for me?" she whispered.

Rex looked at her carefully. Sally had seldom looked more beautiful. She wore the turquoise satin frock and her black cape was draped on her chair. She was a trifle pale — interestingly so — her gold hair was in curly confusion peeping from under her hat. She was staring at him as if he were a saint aloof on his pedestal. It stirred even Humberstone.

"For you, my dear — a pal peace offering. Come, we shan't waste any more time having bad scenes, Sally. You know me and I know you, and this is the twentieth century. Call that ring our pal-engagement ring. You wear it and let people think what they like. When someone comes along for whom you care more than you do for

me give it back or toss it aside and marry him and people will know you would not marry me. Isn't that a fair arrangement?"

Sally slipped it on the third finger of her left hand, holding it up to watch the sparkle. "It is wonderful — a pal-engagement ring!" She seemed a trifle doubtful.

"Doesn't that muzzle Madam Grundy?" he insisted. He wanted to drive home his point. "I missed you, too, Sally dear; your loneliness wasn't a one-sided affair. I thought over all you said and decided this was the best way out, for I'm not the marrying kind and yet I cannot bear to lose you. I know people chatter like old women if a man does take the most beautiful girl in the world about; and the ring protects you, Sally — yet you can feel free to marry anyone else you like at any time. Isn't that fair?"

"I shall never want to marry anyone else," she whispered softly.

"Well"— Rex shrugged his shoulders —"then if you hedge me into a corner — I suppose I'll be quite at your beck and call, won't I?"

"Don't you think that after a little while — a year — even two years — you would want to marry me? How splendid to really belong to you!" She was so serious she did not realize her abandon.

"We'll see. There will never be anyone else for me — not as long as you choose to have it so. Just take pity on an old bachelor and let him live in peace at the club. Meantime, here's to my pal — the prettiest, wittiest, loveliest girl a man could ever love!"

Sally raised her glass in answer to the pledge, the diamond flashing as she did so. It almost satisfied her, for he had given her a bona fide engagement ring, even if there was a string to it. Surely, if she chose to develop

and improve Rex would come to want her for his wife, and then heaven would be hers ahead of time. Meanwhile she must be content with his palship, and the world could think what it liked.

She did not realize the grave ethical wrong — it never occurred to her that the wearing of Rex Humberstone's ring was like the closing of a prison door upon herself as regards other men's attentions. That few men are prone to infringe upon another man's fiancée, and that a two-carat diamond and five engagements a week with the same person tell the world but the one story — that she is his fiancée. So Sally shut herself away from the world of romance, and the ugly strand of untruth grew larger by necessity — for the acceptance of the ring involved the telling of many falsehoods and the allowing of many more to be told about her.

She showed her parents the ring, and in answer to their half pleased, half anxious comments she said, "Please don't say anything to Rex or anyone else. It is just between ourselves; and I — I am not quite sure of myself yet. I want lots of time."

Which was Falsehood Number One.

"Suppose you don't wear the ring until you are sure," suggested her mother. "It seems like an outward pledge."

"It used to be, but people have changed. It is a pledge in a way; Rex and I will never marry anyone else. But we must be positive we want to marry each other. I'm very happy — but I'm very young and there is lots of time."

Which was all she could be persuaded to say about the matter.

Christmas afternoon Dean Laddbarry came to say good-by. He was leaving the next morning for his

long-awaited West. He had heard about Sally Plummer's beautiful engagement ring and had forced himself to watch the society columns to see if the engagement was announced. When it had not appeared he wondered if they considered it bad form, and finally plucked up courage to go and ask Sally.

He found her resting because of a last night's dancing party and in anticipation of the evening's frolic. The flat was rather forlorn with its artificial tree and a few careless-looking Christmas packages. The spirit of the day was not to be found. Densie had worked until midnight sending off packages, and she had ordered a roasted turkey from a restaurant, the Scandinavian handmaiden having unexpectedly taken a few days off. John was restless; something seemed to annoy and tempt him. He kept tramping round the rooms, protesting about useless gifts and telling Kenneth to stop beating his drum. He missed something — it was not just clear to him what it was, but he kept recalling the Christmases when he and Densie were children, when the day started with family prayer, and the mammoth, real pine tree, aglitter with candles and tinsel and heaped with cotton snow, was hidden behind screens in the dining room. Then Uncle Herbert, dressed as Santa Claus, would hand out the presents after breakfast, not even forgetting a new harness for the ponies. After this came church, driving there in the sleigh, and they had half a dozen lonesome folks in for the one o'clock dinner — and such a dinner! Man alive, the women had worked two weeks to prepare it — endless courses and endless laughing and jokes and kindly, family memories recalled, and Uncle Herbert always stood up, wine glass in hand, to sing Believe Me, If All Those Enduring Young Charms, to Aunt Sally, who, after being coaxed and pretending to be annoyed, would

respond by singing Dear, Dear, What Can the Matter Be! This was her Christmas annual; no one knew why, but it was the song with which she responded to Uncle Herbert's serenade.

In the afternoon the neighborhood children came to compare new possessions or John and Densie went to the neighborhood children's trees while Aunt Sally and Ellen Porch packed baskets of food to send by Barney to families who would have had no Christmas otherwise. And the evening passed with a delicious cold supper and more toasts and singing and the children being playfully told to go to bed as was customary on usual nights and their finally being allowed the " extreme unction of the law," as Uncle Herbert declared. There were the string quartet to play delicate little tunes and Aunt Sally to accompany them, and usually the minister recited The Cataract of Lodore, and charades or guessing games followed. At eleven o'clock they would all bundle up to their chins in Aunt Sally's stately guest room and begin to say an old-time cordial good-night, while John and Densie would be found half asleep in the recesses of chairs.

That was a real Christmas — with no annoying phonograph downstairs and this pretense at a holiday, a tired preoccupied wife and a silly little daughter running about with someone old enough to be her father, his other child in New York having a high tea and delicatessen food! It irritated John just as the Golden Rule Syndicate irritated him; he was worried about his own position with them now that they had taken over his store. The firm was undeniably cheap and " legally " dishonest — always staying within the law. He sat down to watch Kenneth with his construction set.

" What are you doing, pop? " Kenneth demanded presently.

"Wondering where we're going to fetch up," he said wearily. "Go into the next room now — I want to nap."

John had not seen Dean; he had made but a brief stay.

"I want to ask if you are engaged," he said to Sally, "before you call the family. Just tell me that."

His honest gray eyes looked at her left hand.

"What about it?" she bantered, really annoyed that she could not name her wedding date and thoroughly shock him.

"Are you engaged to Humberstone?"

She held out her hand. "Yes," she said with bravado. "Now do you believe me?"

He turned away. "Best wishes," he mumbled. "I'm off to-morrow."

"Good luck, Dean. You're a cheerful sort, I must say." Sally was loath to have him go.

"I can't say any more when I know what kind he is."

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose it's the new sort of romance — but it would never be the way I'd do ——"

"You've said quite enough." Sally's head tossed haughtily. "Good-by, Dean Laddbarry."

"There isn't any use, is there? I mean to keep on loving you."

He spoke so simply that it made her eyes glow tenderly. After all, Dean was Dean, there was no one quite like his rude precious self.

"There isn't," she said honestly; "you'll find someone lots nicer. Then you'll forget all about me."

"You don't know how much I care," he answered hoarsely, and before she could speak again he had left the room and she invented polite good-bys to the family from Dean.

She had forced herself to make capital of the incident

to amuse Rex. It served to please him Christmas night, a highly colored version of how Dean had gone away and had wanted her to come with him and how she had shown him her ring and he knew then she was engaged to Rex Humberstone.

" I'm really quite important in your scheme of things, I can see that; but I say, Sally, don't pass up any young millionaires or captains of the Coldstream Guards — you know they're not to be had twice running. I'm sure to surrender to rheumatism or something like that that will shove me on the shelf. Look out for yourself first, y'know, just as we agreed."

Sally laughed gayly, determined not to let him see how much she cared. As yet the intense selfishness of his attitude had not dawned on her.

XIX

With the further success of Densie's exchange a new element came into John Plummer's life — something which as a young man he had never fancied could be so. It was during the summer when Densie boldly rented the adjoining store to her own and started a quilting department, with white-haired women working in the windows to attract passers-by.

John Plummer met another woman! At first it horrified him, but the years of small selfishness and neglect, the continual contrast between his wife and other wives had weakened moral perceptions and the stamina with which he had been endowed.

First of all, he told himself rapidly, he still loved Densie — of course he did. But he had come to see that there are different ways of caring for different people, and that his way of loving Densie was a passive, obligatory affection. At least, so he analyzed it. What had really happened was that now that Densie was economically independent and of no further use to him in small coddling attentions he regarded her in the past tense rather than the present.

This new woman was a "comrade," he very bravely named her, blind to her sensational and cheap tactics. She had been a second-rate actress, and failing in a career she had married and divorced her husband, and had a fruity bundle of domestic wrongs to tell anyone who cared to listen. Long, long ago, she had a baby and it died. She had also written. "Just the little

things that breathed of my very heart, and of course no editor would publish them. The real things never are published, you know," she told John, who agreed with her.

At the present time she was giving dramatic recitals of plays and readings and private elocution lessons. John met her accidentally through The Golden Rule Tea Store. She bought some things and there was a mistake in the order. She came down to rectify it and was referred to John. He had asked her to sit down and explain it, and as she talked to him about the "sugah" and the unfair measure of cereals he began to feel fascinated. She told him her name was Mrs. Iris Starr and she lived at Morningside Courts—"a wee box of a place." She had large, pale-blue eyes and flaxen hair, noticeably flaxen; and she was tall and thin, her white organdie cross-stitched with black emphasizing this appearance. Her hat was a floppy leghorn with plump little roses punctuating the brim, and she wore strings of coral which hung below her waist and had bangles on the end, and numerous rings on all her fingers.

But she knew how to look at one appealingly and pretend she was going to cry, and she had a faculty of making a throaty quiver come into her voice as, for instance, when she spoke of her "broken life" or her "brave little attempts at keeping a home."

John felt very sorry for her. She seemed so graceful, like a girl, and her voice was vibrant and pleasing. She had a humorous side to her, which developed at a spanking pace directly on the heels of tears. She told him she could cook a dinner or go hunting, make a dress or play poker equally well. "And of course my work—

that comes first of all!" Which led up to his asking when the next recital would be. She gave him the name of the hall and the date, two days away, and he made a note of it and took a dollar ticket.

He kept thinking of Iris Starr the rest of the day — what a splendid sort she was, game yet beautiful, efficient yet attractive. Densie lost a great deal of caste after the advent of Iris Starr, and Mrs. Starr received the most generous order of groceries the Golden Rule had ever been known to send forth. She wrote John a tiny pink note scented with lilac, thanking him and saying she would look for him at the recital.

The evening of the recital John industriously got into his tuxedo and groomed himself diligently. No one was at home, so no one paid any attention to his actions. He arrived rather early at a mediocre side hall, the recital being given under the auspices of some church society.

He was impatient with the preliminaries — home-talent orchestra, and so forth — until Mrs. Starr made her appearance in a black chiffon frock embroidered with gold lilies and a great deal of sparkling jet jewelry.

She did the conventional numbers — scenes from Shakespere, with Riley's There, Little Girl, Don't Cry as an encore, and a little of Stephen Phillips, topped off by Paul Dunbar's Adam Never Had No Mammy, and finally the old stand-by, which proved very popular with the audience — The Lady of Shalott!

After the recital John found himself lingering in hopes of congratulating Mrs. Starr. He supposed she would go home in a cab with a bevy of admiring friends and he felt he would be out of place. But the hall cleared quickly and only the treasurer was left, count-

ing the money. In a street dress and hat Mrs. Starr came into view, carrying a bag. She hailed him with a delighted smile.

"How awfully good of you," she began, holding out her hand.

"I think I'm the lucky chap," John responded.

Mrs. Starr cast an anxious eye toward the treasurer.

"Do wait a moment, I must settle this — I want to ask your opinion if you have time." She fluttered across the room and returned presently with a rather rueful expression.

"This is barnstorming!" she declared vehemently. "Think — my night's work nets me twelve dollars and sixty cents! You see I was on a percentage. It doesn't seem very much when you give your whole self to it, does it?"

She had put her hand on John's arm in a sort of shy fashion and they were walking downstairs.

"I should think not!" John championed ardently. "What a shame! You deserve ten times as much — it must be a terrible strain on you, and you did magnificently."

They had reached the foot of the stairs and he looked about for her cab.

"I have no coach and four," she remarked wistfully. "I'll tell you a secret — elocutionists have to walk these days! But then, I make the best of my poor little life." She paused as if to bid him good night.

"You must not go home alone," he urged. "I'd be happy to see you to your door."

"You're so good," she accepted the offer hastily, and John found himself more amused and interested than he had been in years during the too brief walk to Mrs. Starr's apartment. She did not ask him to come in,

but he learned the date of her next recital and promised to come. Each understood that he was to see her home as well.

He walked back jauntily. What a woman she was! Clever, simple, beautiful, and a good fellow — she had been very wise in all she had told him!

When Iris Starr undressed that night she looked anxiously at herself in the glass. She was growing old. It was a weary age of the heart as well as the body. Without her make-up and skilful hairdressing her face was haggard. She counted over the money again. Then she thought of John Plummer. She knew as little of the business world as John did of the artistic. She supposed he must be a rich man, and she knew his wife kept the Woman's Exchange on Dundas Street. Indeed, she had often gone in to lunch there. She could see he was lonely — and handsome — and gullible. And that he had always been loyal to his wife except in vague thoughts.

"I wonder," she mused, turning off the light —"I wonder if I've enough ambition left in me to amuse anyone again." Then in the darkness she smiled at the thought, "It wouldn't take very much brains to amuse him — he's quite lambish!"

John attended the next recital, and the next, and every recital thereafter, accompanying Mrs. Starr home each time. He procured an engagement for her through one of his clubs, and she appeared at a downtown hotel, creating quite a little success. By this time John went in to visit with her at her apartment and was thoroughly conversant with her bruised little life and planned to make her a Shaksperean actress, which she certainly was destined to be. The Sothern-Marlowe revival had stirred her with envy, she confessed, and John gallantly

assured her that she could not only do as well but better.

The whole secret of Iris Starr's fascination for him was her undiluted flattery of him. Densie never flattered. She adored one, but when that adoration was rejected or ignored she turned to other things. To flatter was not in her make-up. Iris Starr had always made her living by flattering both men and women. And she was spending her last years looking for a husband who could not control his generosity. John was an easy victim. He was always kept in a standoffish position — she always impressed on him the fact she was jeopardizing her reputation by being friends with him because he was married, yet she could not help it, he was so wonderful! That in itself was a ten-strike with John, and she knew it. Then she had wonderful little suppers which she cooked herself, and sometimes she asked in an unattractive woman friend — she always saw to the fact of her being unattractive. She allowed John to send her flowers — and sometimes groceries, humorous as it seems — and gradually she won from him the fact that he felt his wife and himself had married too young, they had not known their minds. She learned about Harriet and Sally and Rex — she had seen Rex and admired him from afar — and that his wife was making a mollycoddle out of Kenneth. Diplomatically Iris Starr laid the wires for John's open rebellion against his wife.

Densie did not hear of the affair until the following year, because it was the very last thing that she would have believed. But Sally came home from a hotel dinner with the news that father had that elocutionist there and had tried to hide behind a palm lest she see him. It disturbed Sally far more than it had John. Rex had laughed at it — it made him rather secure with

John Plummer, and he told Sally that she could not expect a young, handsome daddy to stay home reading Fox's Book of Martyrs until the exchange closed!

With customary reserve Densie made light of the matter before Sally. She waited until she was alone with John to ask as to the truth of it.

"I've nothing to say," was his answer.

"You were there — Sally saw you," she remonstrated.

"Yes, I was — and I've been to see her. You don't care what I do, Densie, and there is nothing wrong about the thing. There isn't a finer, nobler woman than Iris Starr. Talk about a hard life — that woman's experiences would fill any two books! I met her accidentally — fate, she calls it — and I'm sure there's no harm in knowing her. I'll ask her up here if you like."

Which was a bluff, and Densie knew it.

"Don't bother. I'm content if you are. Only how would you like to see me taking dinner with a strange man?"

John laughed. It was so impossible to think of Densie's so doing. "Come, dear, maybe I shouldn't have taken her to dinner. It was the first time, on my honor. But she has a rocky time of it to make her way, and a little cheer helps her out. She interests me because she is different from anyone I know. We are merely good friends. You and I are man and wife," he added brutally, "but, by Jove, I've come to see that we are not friends."

"Have you?" she said sadly. "I'm so sorry."

"You wouldn't give an inch in your ideas — which never does in any partnership."

Densie did not answer.

Presently John burst out: "What about Sally and

Rex and their engagement? Is that any worse than my taking Mrs. Starr to dinner?"

"Don't you know only guilty people try defending themselves by comparison?" she asked soberly.

"I'm not defending myself, but if you have a business of your own and run it to suit yourself I have a right to run my business and my affairs ——"

"Do you want to marry her?" she said in the same sober manner.

"Great heavens, no!" Though he began wondering at that very instant whether or not he did want to marry Iris Starr. "What are you driving at?"

"Because if you do — you can," she informed him. "We don't seem to make each other any the more happy by being together."

"I've no idea of upsetting everyone at this stage of the game. I just said early marriages are a mistake."

"I see."

And Densie refused to speak of the matter again. Whatever came to her ears she kept her own counsel concerning; she did not even discuss it with Sally, who made indignant protests. It was John's problem, let him deal with it as he would. Densie had seen Mrs. Starr once, and she smiled in amusement at the disillusionment that was waiting for John should his good fortune ever fail him. But to all appearances she remained the childlike wife of a man who did no wrong in her eyes, and she devoted herself to the exchange so that at the end of the year she figured up she had made as much money as John and had paid her fair share of the expenses besides buying her own and Kenneth's clothes. Iris Starr comrades are expensive trifles.

Lucy Parks died at the holiday season; she had been ailing a long time, only Densie had seen to it that she

had care. There was enough money to bury her decently, and the Plummer family and Miss Hatton, more eccentric than ever these days, were the sole mourners.

The little old lady's death sobered them for an instant; she recalled memories, and again reminded them that there must come an end to all things — even Rex Humberstone and Iris Starr and the Woman's Exchange. Kenneth took her death the most to heart.

"Why didn't she marry and have lots of children to bury her?" he demanded several days afterward.

"Because her lover was killed at Gettysburg, and she was loyal."

"Couldn't she love someone else?"

"People didn't — as much as they do now."

"Isn't it right to love someone else?"

"I guess so, Kenneth — why?"

"I was thinking how nice it would be if you loved someone else, and daddy loved someone else, and Sally loved Dean instead of Rex, and Harry would love someone — and we'd all start in again."

"Why don't you want us to stay the way we are?" his mother asked thoughtfully.

"I don't know — all the old love seems to have worn out." Then he added, "I guess I'll have to get a girl myself. All the boys have one. Cy has a girl, and Mark has a girl, and so has Tommy Kane. I'd like Cy's girl, but Cy wouldn't stand for it. I could have a girl, but I don't want her; she's an Eyetalian and when she hands out the papers in school she whispers, 'I love you,' when she passes me. That don't go — I'd rather be the one to whisper it."

"Thank heaven!" murmured Densie between a tear and a laugh. "An old-fashioned son!"

The next week a great honor befell Densie, as un-

expected as had been the success of her exchange. She was elected state president of the federation of clubs, because of her unusual achievement in the matter of the exchange. She had not realized how victorious she had been. This meant she must give less of her time to the exchange and more to club life. She recalled the shabby little delegate to New York some years before, and how she would now wield the gavel and greet other shabby delegates.

When she told John the news he went out and bought Iris Starr a gold watch and chain. After a soulful talk, inspired by said watch and chain, Iris said diplomatically: "It seems to me divorce is quite as ethical as marriage. You must remember we are living in a new age and people are being divorced for many reasons. They seldom wait for horrid, sordid happenings. The main reason and the most ethical one is that they are true to their own selves."

John had listened spellbound as she concluded: "The only real sin about caring for someone is the hiding it. When a woman fails to grow and develop with her husband she should renounce him without question when he has found a true love. That is only justice."

With a whirling head John agreed and felt strangely elated.

XX

During the close of the year Maude Hatton became princess, with a different frock for each hour of the y, and she called Densie her lady-in-waiting and re-ked her when she failed to carry her pink satin train she wished! The old lady's mind had failed sadly ıce Lucy Park's death, but she stayed on in her soli-ry room, too feeble to work except odds and ends for ensie's exchange, and protesting vigorously if anyone empted to do anything for her.

They finally sent for Densie, and after a little man-ement Densie took the princess to her palace — for the faded old eyes the asylum was a veritable mansion red brick with lawns and gardens and many courtiers ıiting for their queen! She was quite happy, for she t she had come into her own, she told Densie, and she ıs willing to say good-by and be left in state, her gray ad nodding and bobbing royal greetings to all who ssed.

Densie left her with a greater feeling of regret than ıen she had driven home from Lucy Parks' funeral. ith tender pity she looked through the insane woman's ssessions — such a stunted, meager little life as it d been, after all. In the brass-bound trunk, which d been Maude Hatton's father's, was the history of r life — the scraps of her first party dress, yellowed d letters, and in a faded plush box lay the evidences of r one great romance, the little bangle bracelet, the pic-re of a soldier lad taken in Sixty-One, a few letters,

some poems he had copied for her in a flowing beflourished hand — they were clear and legible even yet — Who is Sylvia; and one of her favorite hymns.

Densie burned everything; she felt no one else had the right to pry into the spinster's withered dreams. Had she been at the Little House they would have been put in the attic, but in her present circumstances the furnace was the kindly alternative.

No one missed Maude Hatton. It was a relief to Sally and Kenneth, for they had long been messengers up to the old lady's rooms. When Densie told John what had happened he said he wished she might not last long, that growing old was a mighty monster after every last one of us ——. He merely thought of the incident as applying to his possible future.

For John Plummer and Iris Starr were at that delightful stage of a mild, middle-aged intrigue wherein they were longing to begin all over again, "knowing what we do now" and planning to remodel the universe on original lines.

Densie knew something of what was transpiring, but she paid little attention to it. Pride caused her to seem indifferent, and whenever she saw Iris Starr her sense of humor got the better of her and she could have scolded John as she scolded Kenneth. She was amused at the pensive attitude John assumed when she was at home with him, the bored way in which he sat at the table and kept up a desultory conversation and how he rushed away to go to Iris Starr's apartment and be properly appreciated by having a "soul massage," as Densie named her treatment of him.

Once when she had asked John about the ending of the affair he vigorously protested against the thought of a divorce: that held a certain old-time horror for him.

There were the children to consider, though many of his friends were divorced, even after their own children had married — men who married "too young to know their minds," he told Densie.

"It is not fair to Mrs. Starr, John, to take up her time," Densie had argued; "and it is not pleasant for Sally to keep meeting you like an eloping couple at every secluded dining room in town." She did not mention herself.

"I wish you'd understand the thing fairly. Why are women narrow-minded?" he fumed.

"It seems to me I understand it very well; ordinarily I should have been lost in tears and reproaches."

He looked at her a moment without speaking. Then he said: "I don't think the less of you, Densie; you're the children's mother. Only we have different ideas, and nowadays one is not expected to coop himself up in a two-by-four run and not be permitted any frankness of opinions."

"Don't apologize!"

"By the way. I've had a squeeze for money this month: could you manage with half the allowance?"

John was thinking and had been thinking that if a woman earned as much money as Densie did it was only fair that she use some of it for expenses in the house. Ten years ago he would have protested against such an idea. But it was in keeping with the rest of his modernism.

"Certainly," she said. "I've expected this for a long while."

Despite his splutterings she would not argue the matter.

John's affair with Iris Starr was as laughable as a grown dog's trying to chew up cook's rubbers and a little

soap. It was a puppy-dog sort of escapade which should have taken place twenty years before — and, like all grown-up dogs who attempt chewing up rubbers or soap, everyone called him mad and gave him a prompt court-martial. John was really misjudged.

Iris Starr did not misjudge him, for she was clever in her shallow way and could understand the exact circumstances. She knew she had a difficult hand to play, and unless she played it skillfully she would lose the chance to marry him. She wanted to marry John — he was attractive personally, she could domineer over him, and to her way of thinking he held a "wonderful position." His wife did not understand or appreciate him; nowadays to get a divorce round forty-five or fifty and marry someone else was quite a common occurrence. Iris had known the seamy side of romance far more than John suspected. She saw to it that he looked upon her as a helpless, injured woman with unappreciated genius, due to her timid ladylike ability not to make herself heard; and with all this was the longing to be his home keeper, his mental inspiration, his romantic ideal!

Iris had managed to convey this impression gradually, she could see that John had been the father of a family for so long that it would require clever handling to lead him bodily into the divorce court. She also made him feel that her present position in the matter was almost tragic unless it was short-lived; that to acknowledge John Plummer, a married man, as her great friend was damning to her work and her conscience, and yet — here the pale blue eyes looked like stars with a hint of tears to veil them prettily — she cared so much for him that she was willing to brave social ostracism and to wait until he could divorce his wife or vice versa and they

be married. Iris had been divorced — a pitiful tale as she told it. She said the judge was very tender with her and had denounced her husband bitterly from the bench.

This propaganda was accompanied with a good steak nicely broiled and swimming in butter sauce or some other delicacy John liked and did not have at the flat since the advent of the Scandinavian handmaiden; or else it was told him when they were sitting on the roof of the apartment house, which she had converted into a little box garden, John swinging in the hammock and smoking in contentment and Iris in a lavendery silk with fluttering silver ribbons sitting opposite in a steamer chair, her pale yellow hair in thick braids round her oval head.

She used to send John home at half past nine very punctiliously, and whenever he came home with her from a recital she always had Katiebel Drummond, a cross-eyed spinister with the additional charm of a goiter — waiting to be a proper chaperone, and contrast.

In very short time John adored Iris; he looked upon her as a "pale blossom which must be tenderly cherished" and so forth, and told himself to be careful never to shock or startle her in any way. One could have smiled at John's careful toilet, the slicking-back of his hair and flaunting of new ties. At John's age it was pitiful to behold.

"We can't drift, Iris," he said one winter evening when they were having one of their feasts. "I wonder if I have the right to — to ask my wife for freedom."

He winced as he spoke of Densie before her; strangely enough it seemed a sacrilege.

"I don't see why you can't," Iris said almost too eagerly. "She doesn't want you — no woman wants a

man if she goes into clubs and keeps a shop. I'm so lonesome!" She held out her slender white hands dramatically.

"It is a little hard—after all our lives together——"

"Habit," she answered harshly. "Besides, I've no' doubt she'd rather have her freedom. Your children are growing up. Let her take your boy, and let the girls look out for themselves."

Then she realized she had spoken a little too honestly and she became noncommittal and shy during the rest of the evening. But before John left she had his promise for a talk with Densie and the loan of a hundred dollars.

"Just consider it business, Iris, and think of me as if I were a bank and you borrowed it at six per cent," John had argued.

She had had several of these "loans from a bank." After he left she went about the house humming. It seemed that here was a haven at last. She was weary of hand-to-mouth existence and she would not do any regular work. John was going to marry and take care of her — as long as she had brains enough to make him want to marry her! She smiled triumphantly and nodded to herself as she passed a mirror.

"I think you'll be wise enough this time," she told herself.

While John Plummer and Iris were planning to rebuild their world to their liking Sally Plummer was learning that a dishonest, unreal love breeds ugliness in one's soul, and that she was at a standstill with Rex Humberstone though caring for him in the same infatuated manner.

With her impetuous nature Sally was becoming tragic and unreasonable, perverted in her viewpoint and addled

as to a proper sense of values. She told herself she had a hold on Rex, blushing as she did so. He would not dare cast her off like a worn-out glove. She could remain his financée to everyone's opinion if she chose to do so. She had lied so much for and about him and to herself that she felt a determined recklessness. She had cast her lot with Rex. Other girls had done the same with other men, she discovered, as she went round with him month after month — other pale young girls, overdressed, accompanying cynical men of the world who merely rejoiced in surrounding themselves with youth and who had no intention of marrying them and assuming the cares and obligations of such a relationship! These cynical men of the world would have gallantly argued that there was no harm in what they did, they did not force these young persons to become their companions — neither were they harming them in any way. Well, it is an old beau's art to be evasive, yet to gain his own selfish end!

Sally herself could not explain the exact wrong in the condition. It usually began, as her own affair had, with a young girl's being discontented at home and flattered by someone like Rex, with the young girl's falling a prey to his charms, which the man displayed as wisely as a jeweler does his wares, making boys seem penurious, immature boors by contrast, and gradually the young girl becomes so fascinated with the older man, so changed in her views of life, her standards for pleasure, her belittling of worth and saving — that the boys regard her as "different" and pass her by. Not until years elapse, as with Sally, does that normal, hungry longing to be someone's wife and home maker come to her, the pang of envy when she passes by new babies in white prams with huge bows on

the snowy afghans, which are proudly wheeled by the young girl mothers who have married the boys and dispensed with a few eight-dollar dinners or fifteen-dollar auto drives. It seemed to Sally when she met some of her former friends as if she were peering through the outer bars to a lost paradise.

This was what was slowly happening. It would have crushed some girls, but with Sally it developed defiance. At twenty-four she was as sophisticated as a woman of forty in some ways — the disillusionment of romance, for example. She had gone her way, disregarding her mother, and now a fierce pride would not let her admit to either her mother or her friends that she was anything but content. She said Rex did not want to marry her because he wanted to build just such a style house — men have such set ideas, you know, not like a boy, content with love in a cottage! After this excuse wore out she said she did not want to give up her freedom, there was plenty of time and she was having too good a time; she made her foolish little painting daubs a shield — but everyone saw through and over and round the shield, and only smiled in pity. Sally wanted to do her own work in her own way, she would insist, and when one married — well — one could not do as he wished, and so she thought she would wait a little longer! All the time the brilliant ring haunted her with its useless binding beauty. It was a far handsomer ring than any of her girl friends had had — but they had added a wedding band long ago!

Sally used to argue with herself to become convinced this was the true state of affairs and she was happy. She forced herself to be content; then by force of contrast she would become savage toward Rex and indulge

in wild moods, during which she upbraided him and he sat frowning and sipping a cordial, saying:

"Come, Sally, wrinkles don't become that pretty forehead. You know I've always been frank with you — there isn't anyone I like half so much. Do be your jolly self and let's shoo the worries off!"

After brief periods of rebelling and resolving to go away and make Rex realize that if he really cared enough for her to marry her he must do so, Sally would try to school herself not to see him for a week. To this he would laughingly agree, but within a few days Sally would have called him up and meekly asked him to come and take her driving!

"It isn't real love, Rex; I do know that much," she said one day during the January of 1910. "It is something terribly like it — the same as a reconstructed jewel can almost fool an expert. It is a ghastly sort of emotion that can engulf you — and yet even while it does so you realize it is not real!"

They had driven to the country club and were lounging before an open fire.

"Ah, Sally, you're going to have me on the rack again, aren't you? How pretty you look," he kissed his finger tips to her — but she shook her head.

There had been a time when a compliment would have swayed her from earnest discussion, but that was past — it was more often the signal for a battle. She had learned to know the seductive influence of such compliments. In reality Sally was suffering from cabin fever, as her mother had suffered from it years before. One can have cabin fever in a white-marble palace as well as a desert lean-to. Rex was the cause of Sally's cabin fever.

"Don't drag in those things when I try to be serious,"

she pouted, standing up to throw off her coat, unaided, and settle herself before the fire.

Rex looked at her critically. With all her tantrums Sally had not begun to fade. She looked older than her twenty-four years, but a beautiful sort of woman of whom he could not help being proud.

"If you will be serious I shall stand it, because I can look at you and think how lovely you are." He put the tips of his white fingers together.

"You don't seem to realize that I cannot give up my girlhood and my womanhood to you — just trot round half engaged and half not engaged, wearing your ring and never being able to say when I'm to be married. I should think you would want to be married," she added rather rudely. "What will you be twenty years from now? A lonely old man in a lonely old hotel ——"

"No; a mummy," he corrected, chuckling.

"Your humor is out of place. The whole thing is this — I shall not keep on knowing you unless we are engaged."

She bit her under lip as she spoke, for she hated these scenes as much as Rex did; they always seemed to Sally "so unfair to have to have" — she could not see why he did not settle the question properly, as Dean Laddbarry would have done.

"No, I suppose not," he answered, to her surprise; "but I could never make you happy — I'm beastly set in my ways, and you'd better wait. At thirty you will pick out a duke — and then give an old pal a thought, won't you?"

"What duke will pick me out at thirty? With everyone saying, 'She has loved Rex Humberstone for over ten years, and he never wanted to marry her — just monopolize her!'" Sally turned her face away from him.

"Ahem! Stormy weather, mates; very stormy weather! Here, Sally, all the time you've been ragging me I had this in my pocket." He drew out a white kid case in which was a handsome sapphire pin.

Sally's eyes sparkled as she spied it. "What is this for?" She could not refrain from adding: "Breach-of-promise present?"

"A splendid way to thank a chap," he drawled, laughing at her impertinence. "No; just a reminder that nothing is too good for you, and therefore I am not good enough! Come on, pal, put it on your lace collar and give us a smile. Haven't I earned it?"

"I'd rather be engaged," she protested. Then she gave a sharp exclamation. "It is hideous to have to talk this way to a man! My mother never mentioned such things first."

"I can quite believe it," he sneered.

Sally turned on him in indignation. "You don't like mummy because she is old-fashioned and has ideals. But she is worth ten of you or I. Only I have disappointed her, and now it is too late. We all disappointed her, so she went to find her own salvation. For one, I say she was right. She has made a success in spite of us, Rex; not because of us."

"She's a clever woman," he applauded sardonically. "I'm sure I never said otherwise."

"She is more than clever — she is good." Sally was thoughtful, her great gold eyes watching the fire crackle. "But everything seems changing. Here is father making an idiot of himself over Iris Starr, and mummy knows it. Fancy preferring that inane old doll with a professional smile and a flock of bangle bracelets to mummy. And there's Harriet growing more like a machine and less like a human being. Sometime she'll

wake up and find herself turned into a typewriter or a filing cabinet!" Sally laughed at her own nonsense. Her sense of humor invariably tripped in to rescue her from the depths. "And Ken has downy lips, and his voice is a soprano one moment and a basso profundo the next. Poor old Ken, he's going to have a chance to benefit from our mistakes. He says he is going to be a soldier — a captain, if you please. I think he wants to wage war on all flat dwellers!"

"Aha, we're ourselves again."

Rex was delighted. His nerves gave warning whenever Sally had a scene. He might have called it conscience but he had long preferred the other name.

"How do you really make all your money?" she asked abruptly.

"Gambling with someone's else money," he answered lazily. He usually told her the truth about business because he knew he could trust her.

"That isn't right."

"Right things never interested me."

Sally was silent. She was also admitting another humiliating thing — that she was consumed with strange jealousy concerning his past life, she wanted to know everything that had transpired; she felt herself on a level with the woman who goes through her husband's pockets while he sleeps. Yet the thwarted heart of her was bound to have an outlet, and since she had made Rex the sum total of her existence she was forced to expend her energy upon him in some direction. Jealousy at best is a humiliating trait — and to Sally, naturally without it, it was an acquired one and therefore twice as vivid in its effects. She was jealous of this blasé man of the world who had psychically stolen her youth and held her apart from her own kind.

Presently she gave up trying to pin Rex down to anything definite, and in abandonment became unnaturally hilarious, thereby making Rex feel that Sally's gay moments were worth having to stand for the rough ones, for she was the best tonic of which he knew, and she was as pretty as the day he had first met her.

XXI

When Sally Plummer returned from the country-club trip the afternoon Rex Humberstone gave her the sapphire pin she found her mother and a secondhand man going over the flat and making notations of articles and prices.

After the man left, Densie said briefly, "I've decided to move into the King's Court Apartments; I cannot neglect the flat and I have no time to take care of it."

"Those are horribly expensive places!" Sally's eyes were wide open.

"I know, but I've been appointed district suffrage leader and it pays a fair wage. With my exchange I can manage the rent myself."

"How in the world will you have time for the exchange?"

"I've a manager, a woman who needed the work." Densie could have added: "A woman such as I was a few years ago — with cabin fever." But she only explained: "She will take complete charge. I've come to see that I cannot have a flat and a business too. Harriet is never with us, and you and daddy are away much of the time."

"Will you sell everything?"

"Yes, I want something modern. I've a decorator in mind who can do the apartment for me; he did my exchange. I shall be entertaining a little, you see."

Sally was rather amazed. This seemed a new and strange mummy. She did not know that Densie ex-

pected John to ask for a divorce, and she planned on the apartment as her permanent home.

"How many rooms are there?"

"Five — and a kitchenette. We can get our dinners where we like; I shall have a light breakfast in the living room."

Densie was businesslike as she spoke. She did not ask Sally if she approved or as to her views. Sally could not but recall the day they moved into the flat and Densie had been so eager to please everyone else first and herself last of all.

"I'm sure it will be very nice," she mentioned meekly. She lingered about as her mother looked through a pile of books. "I'm — I'm very tired of not doing something," she said wistfully; she was regretting the breach that had come between them.

"Why don't you do something?" Densie asked hopefully. "It is not too late to forget Rex. I had a letter from Dean this morning; he sent you his love and he is doing very well."

Sally shook her head. "I can't forget Rex. He isn't the sort that lets himself be forgotten. Mummy, what got into me four years ago?"

"I don't know, dear; I tried to find out, but your heart seemed to just lock itself up and we were strangers."

Sally came and laid her head on her mother's shoulder. "Do you think Rex will ever marry me?" She was like a disconsolate child.

To her horrified surprise Densie felt a bewildered impatience — as John used to feel when some of these "woman" things strayed into his path. Like John she wanted to take her hat and go downtown!

"I don't know," she repeated; "I have hardly seen

Rex, and I have steeled myself to indifferen
Vaguely she patted Sally's hair. "Why don't you
away — go visit Harriet? She might be good for
at this time. Harriet has the poise and power you n
and she needs your sweetness and gayety. Stay with
a few weeks and find yourself."

It seemed to Densie this was the best way out of
matter. Yet underneath the coating of ice flowed
swift warm current of her heart — only she had
the ice as a shield against any further assaults!

"Perhaps I will — I do need someone. Would
mind if I went now, mummy? There's the r
ing ——"

"Go to-night," said Densie as unconcernedly as
might have been. "I shan't do any work about
moving, it is being done for me."

Sally hesitated still further. "Of course, I hav
been doing much work lately — not as much as I o
to have done, and ——"

"Is it money?" Densie smiled. She had lear
that money was the easiest thing in the world bot
earn and to give. She went to her desk and wrot
check. "Now, run along and get your ticket —
don't come home until you have found how wrong i
to waste yourself on a man who neither wants nor
serves you."

The sensible advice might have been snapped out b
bank president to his erring cashier. They seemed
eign words coming from Densie's small, gentle sel

Inspired by the idea, Sally obeyed, and after a li
more sorting out of things Densie went down to
decorator's establishment.

Before Sally left for New York — she did not
for three days because she could not resist telling

at it was to be a farewell and then accepting his good- dinner — the flat had been rented and the decorators re busy at the new apartment. It was known as Mrs. ensie Plummer's apartment, which John noted in grim t helpless disapproval. Iris Starr also noted it and ok pains to impress on him his extreme manliness and r extreme dependency.

While Sally was away the Plummers moved into the art, expensive apartment — one of the best in the y, and renting for a hundred a month. It consisted a living room in old rose and gray with French prints d silvered firedogs and floor cushions of black velvet. was not at all homelike but distinctly clever, there was denying that. A baby-grand player replaced the old onized upright, and Densie's desk, a curlicue-legged, sewood affair, was the busiest-looking spot in the room, aped with correspondence and all manner of memoran- ms, while a rose-shaded reading lamp stood close at nd. The only live thing in the room was a globe of ldfish, so Kenneth mournfully remarked.

The bedrooms were equally clever — Sally's in pink, d John's and Kenneth's in severe arts and crafts, while ensie blossomed forth in French blue and gold with mpire furniture finished in dull ivory. The arrange- ents for breakfast were smothered in the kitchenette d allowed to come forth only during the brief respite coffee and toast making, and a vacuum cleaner was stily rolled over stray crumbs, the janitor's wife doing e dishes.

Nor did Densie's moving end with a change of house nd furnishings. Smart wearing apparel was her next tep in advance. She saw that as president of the feder- tion and suffrage leader she must be properly gowned. s owner of the exchange a quaint dress was quite the

thing, but that would no longer do. Sally's wardrobe fell behind in comparison with her mother's. Trim rows of boots and slippers, silk stockings and underwear, very short and fluffy gowns, hats with French labels, and a good brooch and a string of white coral, with the constant aid of curling irons and Madame Somebody's astringent cream and vanishing power soon transformed John Plummer's wife into Mrs. Densie Plummer, one of our most prominent clubwomen, as the papers graciously began to call her.

When Kenneth came into the apartment from skating, one day after the removal, and saw his mother dressed for some evening affair, in a Chinese blue-satin creation with a petunia-colored cape for contrast and gold-tinsel slippers, the pretty brown hair properly fluffed and her newly manicured hands buttoning long white gloves, he fell into a chair and let his skates drop recklessly on the new rose rug.

"All you need is a new husband," he said in irreverent praise.

At which Densie laughed and thought with a quick pain that the leaven had been willing, but the lump was heavy! She kissed him good-by and gave him a dollar for his dinner, leaving a memorandum for John that she would not be home until late. As she was about to turn off the lights of the modern salon she saw her charming reflection in a mirror and felt the goodness of having silken hose and undergarments, a properly modern frock, the strange joy of having earned it herself — she began to feel young, as young as John Plummer felt when Iris Starr called him her misunderstood boy, and far younger than Sally, who was trying to find herself with the aid of Harriet's statistical self.

"A new husband" — she laughed out loud as she

ssed down the hall. What ideas youngsters of to-day d! Then she dismissed her family as John used to dis- ss it as he went out of the gate each morning — for : evening affair was one of importance and she ex- cted to accomplish a great deal more than was sus- cted for the time being. Densie was the politician of : family these days!

XXII

Sally at twenty-five, dispirited and sad of heart, a Harriet at twenty-seven, successful and impersonal ward all mankind — were a strange contrast. S looked forward to seeing Harriet; she hoped the lat common sense would help her through the period anguish resulting from giving up Rex. Like most of fellow creatures Sally was in search of a crutch u which to limp out of a bad situation. She did not realize that other people cannot act as crutches in ser matters, and she would have to stand on her own s feet and walk out quite unhampered by someone e moral suasion.

Harriet was as kind to Sally as she knew how to She had so lived apart from love affairs that to g her for their solution was like asking her to decide advisability of the south of China's compelling the n of China to become a republic and to have all t males' cues cut off instanter! It was interestisng different, and she took an impersonal pleasure in h ing Sally's jumbled little story.

Leila Cochrane had been Harriet's only human ment; and Leila, who was nothing but an inane c ing vine "with a baby-blue smile," as Sally told mother, had never had an original idea in her life. S had also described the situation as: "Harriet foots bills and lets Leila do as she likes. Harriet says L mends her stockings and makes nice cinnamon toas that is as far as their attraction goes. And Leila

tends to understand all Harriet's big ideas and to copy her in her clothes — but underneath it all she is a little freckle-faced fraud!" Needless to say, Leila and Sally did not grow fond of each other, hence Sally's uncomplimentary but truthful analysis.

Sally found Harriet had a streak of gray in her black hair, premature gray from excessive study and lack of nourishment. She wore an attractive sort of clothes, the exclusive, severe, simple sort — made "for people who appreciate the Satires of Horace," was Sally's way of describing her sister's wardrobe. To Sally's surprise her sister owned a showy little-finger ring, a great fire opal set in dull gold. Harriet's vanity was asserting itself in spite of her.

"How in the world did you come to buy it?" Sally demanded.

Harriet almost blushed. "Extra money I earned from committee work — it appealed to me. I don't know why."

Sally shook her finger at her. "You will be frivolous in spite of yourself; I remember when you wouldn't have worn a gold safety pin."

"We change — you've changed. You're not as gay and shallow — something has happened to your eyes. Let me see," Harriet's sober black ones studied her sister's face for a long time. Then all she said was a brutal, "They look stabbed."

Sally's chin quivered. "I want to ask you all about it; mummy is so busy and different I can't ask her as I would have once."

"Tell me after supper."

Harriet frowned. She had not learned to give of herself. To look at some incident or happening or result of a happening was interesting, she immediately

analyzed it and made a definite deduction as to its effects being good or bad. But to be a sympathizing, consoling element was not within her possibilities. However, Sally was her sister and it was her duty, so she steeled herself for the ordeal.

Harriet and Leila had an attractive apartment in its way, strewn with articles of good taste and quality. Harriet had decidedly patrician ideas as to her surroundings. She spent her large salary as fast as she earned it, and out of all her earnings she had saved but a paltry five hundred dollars. She paid more for her clothes than Sally did. Sally would go to a remnant sale, select odds and ends, clean, repaint even, or twist and turn — and lo, she had a creation. Harriet could not wield a needle, her fingers were always clasped about a book or a pen, and she bought lavshiiy of what she wished and took no heed for the morrow. She knew she had unusual ability in the direction of her work and her advancement would be steady. Saving was something that had never interested her.

After a formal supper, with Leila doing the dishes and trying to catch a whisper as she passed in and out, Harriet and Sally sat down to talk, Harriet like a judge impartially awaiting the evidence! It did not take Sally long to tell Harriet — one of Harriet's charms was her keen way of grasping a situation; it was like Aunt Sally.

Briefly Sally confessed the whole wretched affair, ending with the craving for a home and children, to be like other girls, stretching out her little fingers, the diamond ring sparkling away in triumph.

"He is too old for you," began Harriet shrewdly.

At which Sally interrupted to say that she did not care about age, she loved him, he made her love him,

but he had stolen her girlhood and caused her to become old before her time. No boy would ever love her now, nor could she love any boy.

"And you don't think you've enough talent to come to New York as an artist?" Harriet said unwillingly, thinking that if Sally should come it would be her — Harriet's — duty to say to Leila that her sister must be her comrade instead of Leila. This Harriet did not want to do.

Sally shook her head. "I've lost my chance at ever working. I've wasted my time trying to tempt and please Rex. He's a way of making you stay concert pitch when he is about. I can't do anything but love someone, Harriet."

Harriet frowned. "You are weak." She looked at her sister with characteristic disapproval. "If your environment had been different you could have been a model Victorian wife — like mummy, all bows and ruffles, and singing hymns in a meek little voice. Or else you could have been quite impossible, what we call a 'borderland' girl, lacking in moral perceptions."

She spoke so calmly that Sally felt as a butterfly on a pin, having some scientist clumsily point out the spots on the wings.

She did not answer.

"I'm sure I don't know what to say — I'm not up on romance. It seems to me you are to blame and you ought to buck up and never see or think of him any more."

"That would be easy for you to do," ventured Sally, quite discouraged.

"Why marry, anyway? An inane maze in which you have an awful time wandering about!"

"Because it was what I was meant for," said little Sally simply. "I had my foolish ideas when I was twenty, but I know myself now ——"

She was thinking of Dean Laddbarry and the time he asked her to marry him; not that she loved him, but she wished she had never known this sinister, fascinating Rex. Perhaps she might have cared for Dean instead, and everyone been happy. She saw that Harriet could not understand, just as Sally could not understand why Harriet wanted to write an economic history of the United States.

"Anyway, Sally, you ought to do something — you must not be dependent on father."

Sally laughed. "My dear Hariet, father and mother are changing places. Mummy is the man of the family, she tends to paying the bills and father spends his money on himself."

"That's an inducement to come home," Harriet said crisply.

"We've a swagger apartment, and mummy has ordered enough clothes to go round the world in."

Harriet folded her arms across her chest in an approving, judicial manner.

"Good work! So poor old father goes his own way — eh?"

"He is rather gone on Iris Starr. An amusing person — we call her mutton dressed as spring lamb; she is an elocutionist who would like to marry father only father shies at a divorce."

The two modern daughters giggled wickedly over the situation.

"Won't mummy say the word release?"

"I think so; it is father. After all, they're of the

old régime. They can go just so far and that is all — but mummy has come on considerably."

"Why not a divorce?"

"Harriet, it wouldn't seem right." Sally was undecided as to just why it would not.

"Nonsense! Everyone would be better off. I believe in marriage contracts."

"How far we've gotten from the old ways of the Little House," said Sally pensively. "It is an odd thing, but whenever I've been unhappy about Rex I've always thought back to those days. Do you remember the library with hundreds of books no one read, the piano, the picture — that little one of the Christ Child that we had to stand underneath while we said our Bible verses every Sunday morning?"

"No, I don't."

Harriet was beginning to be bored, was Sally going to develop a sentimental strain?

Sally saw her change in attitude. She rose, saying, "Poor Leila has been scullery maid all alone."

"I hope you find plenty to do and see here — and just don't think of him is the best advice I know," Harriet concluded. "If you can't paint good pictures learn to trim hats or do something so as to make a living and be independent of every one and everybody. By the way, how is young Ken?"

"Smokes openly, and still plans to be Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines — Ken is a side issue nowadays, with the folks."

"Don't think about him," ended any counsel and advice from Harriet. She had a scorn for Sally's weakness in the matter, because she could not understand it. She took her diligently to the theater and dinner, with Leila tagging enviously along; she tried to interest her

in her work and introduced her to some co-workers. But Sally was too pretty and frivolous to suit them or be suited by them. All the time was the intense longing for Rex, the fear that he would be angry at her for having gone away and saying she would not write, the same servile adoration for him; which was neither healthy nor normal. That fear of all beautiful women born to love and be loved had gripped Sally's heart — an old maid! An unwanted or, worse still, rejected spinster! She fought the phantom nightly when she tried to sleep in Harriet's cot-bed arrangement, which was placed halfway into the kitchenette and halfway into the hall — such was New York Bohemian existence!

After all, finally argued Sally with her usual sophistry, was it not better to have Rex's love cruelly repressed and incomplete as it was, than to have nothing, as Harriet's life seemed to be — flat and devoid of interest? Everyone coupled their names together; no one else dreamed of Sally Plummer's looking at another man — nor could she. There was only Rex, no matter how much older he was or how lacking in fulfilling his obligations. At least everyone thought she was engaged — she could say it was this or that which prevented marriage, and try, try harder than ever to make Rex want to marry her, and at the same time try to find some satisfying work. So the old strand of deceit, of which Rex was sponsor, came unworthily to her rescue.

She wrote Rex a contrite and appealing letter with a few smart sayings purporting to be original but which she had copied from a short story. Rex liked her to say clever things. He despised the old homely method of bromidic conversation such as "I love you" or "I miss you." It must be dished up like a sweetheart *á la brochette* to suit his jaded humor.

To her great joy Rex wired he was coming to New York on business and he was making the business engagement suit her visit there; he would arrive the next morning. She told Harriet with as much gladness as if she were going to be married. The effect of the old stimulus was surprising. Harriet's thin scarlet mouth curved in scorn.

"You are as weak as a child! It is just as well you don't marry and have children, for you could not give them any proper mental or moral inheritance. I believe you planned this visit all along. Now didn't you?"

Which so angered Sally that she scarcely spoke to Harriet during the remainder of her stay. Rex arrived as debonair and attentive as ever. He said New York suited Sally, she needed a city with its purportedly beautiful women to prove how wonderful she was. He met Harriet with overpowering politeness and veiled contempt. Harriet regarded him as "a strong character — no wonder a jellyfish like Sally can't have her way with him." That ended Harriet's interest in the affair. In her quiet fashion Leila Cochrane thought enviously of Sally, that she was a lucky girl to be engaged to such a generous handsome man of the world, even if she had been engaged a long time and was likely to continue in the same state.

Sally and Rex did theaters and cafés and had a general good time, in which Harriet did not offer to participate. Harriet did not care for anything except Ibsen or an occasional symphony concert. After a week of riotous times Sally went home ahead of Rex, knowing that she had defeated the very purpose of the vacation her mother had given her — that she was even more dependent on Rex than before.

Densie saw the truth of this at once — she had heard Rex Humberstone had gone to New York. Whereas a few years ago she would have packed her bag and followed to argue with Sally, now she only smiled bitterly and reminded herself that modern children permit no interference in their affairs, one must let them alone and watch them grapple unaided with the brambles.

"Oh, so Rex came, did he?" was all she said.

"Yes, he had business — and I wanted him," Sally told her honestly. "How lovely this room is, mummy, and what a charming negligee! You seem a girl in it. How in the world did you hit on this scheme — doesn't daddy approve?"

"He is fairly comfortable. Tell me about Harriet."

"She is coming up to see you. She thinks you're a wonder." Sally was watching her mother discreetly powder her nose and slip on some rings. "You have been successful, haven't you?"

"A little. There is a letter from Dean. He sent you a message."

Densie pointed out the envelope. Underneath the ice coating the warm current of her mother heart was fairly rushing out to Sally!

Sally picked it up unwillingly, she dreaded reading the frank, earnest sentences. She was beginning to shrink from contrasts.

"Odd that he writes to you, isn't it?"

"I'm next best to Sally, is Dean's logic. Here is my gown for the luncheon — like it? Help me fasten the side."

Densie had slipped on something that was like a gray cloud with sunset showing underneath. Obediently Sally laid the letter aside and hooked the frock.

"It is lovely," was all she said.

Densie found her outer wraps. "I shan't be in all afternoon — and I'm having my committee on the penny-luncheon fund in for coffee this evening. Your father will not be at home." She smiled faintly. "I've a theater ticket for Kenneth. If you would like to help serve I'll be glad to have you." She spoke easily, as if it mattered very little whether or not Sally stayed.

"I think, I'll go to my room, mummy; I'm tired."

"All right — as you wish. Now I'm off." She took up her silver purse. "So you've not decided anything new as to Rex," she could not keep from adding. "Sally, you've the lines about your eyes that belong to my age — not yours!"

"I've decided to make the best of it. I'd rather be unhappy loving Rex than to be unhappy not loving him — and he has his good qualities. I can't seem to say what they are, but he has. It's a modern sort of arrangement; perhaps it isn't so wicked, after all. Anyway, I cannot give him up — and I tried."

"For three weeks," Densie supplemented.

"I tried!" Sally cried out shrilly. "It is just my form of a cross, perhaps, to love the wrong man; and I won't hear another word about it."

"Very well." Densie was the impersonal, successful business and club woman. It was she who closed a door in one's face. "As for your expenses, I'll pay them until you decide what you want to do. But you shall not be a slug, even if you do love the wrong man."

"I'll earn my living!" her child told her, white with anger — not at her mother, though it seemed so, but at her own wayward self. "I'll earn it by doing something that won't disgrace Mrs. Densie Plummer, president of the state federation!"

Left to herself Sally did read Dean's jolly whole-

souled letter breathing of activity and success and ending with: "Tell Sally I've no other girl's picture in my watch, but when she decides the date of her wedding I'll send her the best set of baskets the Washoe tribe can make. I won't promise to take the picture out of my watch — unless she says I must. She's a good-hearted little tyrant and will allow me that much even if I did lose the original!"

She crumpled up the letter, wishing she had not read it. She hated herself — the new artificial way of living; the apartment seemed stuffy and inadequate. She felt if she were a little girl in proper white aprons over tartan-plaid wool frocks, saying her Bible verses underneath the picture of the Child, if she could turn back the hourglass until then — that she would grow up loving Dean. Men like Rex never find the way to Little Houses; their feet choose other trails.

XXIII

During the next year John and Densie came to the understanding that when Kenneth was twenty-one they would get a divorce so John could marry Iris. Each felt a reticency to do so beforehand. When the boy was of age their joint responsibility as parents would be ended, according to law. That would be five more years. And though John thought of Iris and waxed impatient as he did so, and Densie thought of her own plan to live abroad — each found a certain relief in delaying the evil day.

"When people marry in love and harmony in the sight of God and man, and that harmony disappears," John had argued, "the marriage has disappeared, and the legal contract alone remains in the sight of man."

Densie had agreed. She was sitting in the living room waiting for a cab to take her to a meeting. "I appreciate your viewpoint; we are no longer essential to each other or the children. Our lives are in different channels. I have no quarrel with you"— here the undercurrent flowed very swiftly, so much so that it caused a flush to show in her face; "I could never bear to have an ugly, inharmonious ending."

"Densie," he said softly, "that could never be. I shall always respect you — always. You are the children's mother. And you were my little sister before you were my wife. I could never think of you with anything but the same love I had for you when we were children. I don't understand how it has all come

about; I truly wish it had not. But I am no longer the man for you ——"

"Which always means 'I am not the woman for you!' Well, perhaps it is better as it is. I could never return to the old drudgery of a home. You were impatient of it long before I was. And so we have outlived our usefulness to each other."

"You have been generous about expenses," he said almost shamedly.

"And so I should be. I wished for certain things — clothes, furniture, club positions; I made my own money my own way and you never questioned my right to do so. I could not think of asking you to bear my expenses from now on. Use your salary as it pleases you."

"Mighty decent," he mumbled, the old method of one purse in the household occurring to him for some damnable reason. "What do you think will become of our children? We shall always have that common interest."

"Harriet will never marry. She is not the problem. It is Sally who has given her heart to a worthless man. Unless she reclaims it — she is doomed."

"And Kenneth?" he asked. "I've never grown close enough to him to read the handwriting on the wall."

"I want Kenneth to be in the Army," she said proudly. "He must make up for his sisters' lacks."

"Captain Jinks — is that the idea?"

The bell rang and John answered.

"It is your cab," he said politely.

"Oh, thank you." She put on her coat.

"Have you ever thought," he asked gently, "what Aunt Sally and Uncle Herbert would say if they had been here just now as eavesdroppers?"

Densie's face dimpled. "I know what they would

do — the old remedy they used when you copied Barney's swearing and I contradicted Ellen Porch — a good mouth wash of quinine!"

John chuckled. "About right," he answered, opening the door politely. After she had gone, never asking as to his plans, he sat for a long time and wondered whether people these days were "bigger fools than they looked or looked bigger fools than they were!"

Iris was enraged over the delay, but too clever to be anything but purportedly shy and grieved about it and to make John regard her as a sprite which would vanish if anything was said or done to hurt her feelings. Besides, John could loan her money — particularly now that his wife had agreed to free him after Kenneth was of age. And money was Mrs. Starr's large idea of happiness. After a few pensive tears and sighs upon hearing the news, and the mournfully counting off the years, she borrowed another hundred and made John a club sandwich while they talked about their future like two eloping school children.

At the club meeting that evening Densie read two brief but clever little papers. One was called The Passing of the Woodshed and the Fence, a slightly satirical skit on changing conditions with a sting of truthful reproach in it. The other she named Cabin Fever, after the Westerners' method of expressing mental malady resulting from continued isolation. Housewives, she explained, all had spells of cabin fever, clubs were an antidote, the women of America had long been a prey to cabin fever, and she ended with an appeal for women to step outside their thresholds and become attuned with the present generation.

At the conclusion of the meeting someone touched her on the arm.

"Senator James Gleason wishes to meet you. He was our honor guest to-night, but he came late, so you did not notice him."

Densie crossed the room to the small boyish-looking man in immaculate evening dress. He had wavy white hair, combed pompadour fashion, and dark eyes with a keen expression. Altogether he was a refined little person, his head two sizes too big for his body. He held out his hand cordially as she came near.

"I want to tell you that cabin fever happens to senators, as well," he began simply; "but I think you ought to have another paper on cures for it, don't you?"

He just naturally led the way to an isolated corner; and being Madame President and the senator the others respectfully let them alone.

His keen eyes kept studying her face. She liked him — he had a gentle, firm voice and his movements indicated deliberation and poise. He made her feel at ease instantly and the only thing that puzzled her was how with his endowment of qualities and his rather visionary ideas he had ever fought his way up in politics. She had heard of him before as being interested in women's clubs and philanthropic reforms, and she recalled a rumor that he was a very rich widower. As he talked she began to feel a direct interest in him, and she found herself telling him informal ideas that she had evolved during her presidency.

"You own the Woman's Exchange, don't you?" he asked; "where you can buy homemade things?"

"Yes, but I have it managed for me — I haven't the time. The homemade things are the work of cabin-fever victims!"

"I'm going to lunch there to-morrow," he continued eagerly. "I wonder if you couldn't manage to drop

n at the exchange toward one o'clock? I want to talk o you about some matters — first, business matters; ınd then I'd like to talk to you."

This would have sounded rather impudent in anyone :lse. Densie had been so unused to the society of men :hat she did not realize its personal significance. She merely thought him a friendly little man, who had great influence with the President, so everyone said.

" I can try," she promised.

" Then we'll see each other there. Good night, Mrs. Densie Plummer — you've a homemade name, too! "

Bowing gracefully the great-little man left her.

Densie could not think of anyone else the rest of the evening. She wondered what he wanted to talk to her about at luncheon.

XXIV

Another world opened for Densie after her luncheon at the exchange. At first it bewildered her, for there was still the old reticence about meeting some stranger without her husband by her side. She had not known how very different men can be — when she had been married, and a mother at twenty! She had heard of other men only through John's lips or seen them with his eyes. Life was ended for her as regarded romance. In that respect Densie had long since considered herself an old woman. The pleasure that business and social success had given her had been largely a solitary sort of national importance.

The senator had been at the exchange ahead of time, and when Densie came in dressed in her gray gown he smiled in approval and said some pretty, easy thing, which both confused and delighted her. Densie had had an idea of telling John about the invitation and including him in it. But she reconsidered that. John had been brutally frank concerning Iris Starr — why should she refuse a diplomatic invitation to meet a man of national importance? She did not tell either of the children — Sally was too preoccupied with her own tangles, and she felt that Kenneth would have wanted to come along.

"You don't know how good it was to hear you say those quaint things last night," the senator began as they sat down at their table.

The manager of the exchange, recovering from cabin fever, thanks to Densie, smiled approvingly as she looked at them. They were a well-matched couple — the senator's boyish figure, his white hair, his immaculate suit, and Densie's trig good-appearing self in gray tulle.

"I was almost afraid to say what I thought," she admitted. "It is the first time I have ever strayed into original lines. Why did you like it?"

"Because it was sincere. And if a person is sincere everything about her — her life, her associates, her achievements — must of necessity be the same. That was why I wanted to know you. I've been tremendously interested in club work for years, and theoretically I am heart and soul with the movement. I see the justice and need for it. But when I descend from the clouds of theories and walk on earth and really see things as they are done I lose my ideals — for I find very few sincere persons."

"I wonder if that is always so!"

"You probably do not discern the fact, due to your own worth. I wish you'd tell me of yourself and your family. I like to know about the people I like." He spoke so naturally that she felt as if she wanted to oblige him.

"Perhaps I ought first to tell you of myself," he added, "for if you have read all that is printed about me you have a strangely wrong idea."

He briefly outlined his life, a dreamer yet endowed with common sense, a man with independent means, thus saved from the necessity of grappling with the world to gain from it bare necessities and to win luxuries only by cheating or cleverly laid and not too ethical plans. He described his school life, his trips abroad,

he mentioned his ideal marriage with a sentiment pleasing to Densie, for it was as Uncle Herbert would have spoken. He told of his entrance into politics, the help his wife had been, the grief at the loss of their only child, a daughter, his wife's death a year later, the resolve always to help women in whatsoever manner he could, because of her blessed memory.

As Densie listened she felt she knew him as she knew Dean Laddbarry. He seemed to her old-fashioned yet strangely new-fashioned, to have combined the virtues of both the eras and discarded the vices of each.

She must have shown her admiration, for he paused to say: "Quite enough about myself. Your turn, please."

Densie faltered. "There is so little to tell — a middle-aged woman with a grown-up family. I own the exchange. I am president of the federation. When I married I never dreamed this would be so; circumstances brought it about."

At which the senator read between her words and admired the modesty which refused to repeat details. All he said was, "Your husband is John Plummer, used to be Plummer & Plummer, Warehouse, didn't it?"

"Yes — one of the oldest firms. But my husband felt he could not battle alone with new methods. The firm was absorbed by this new corporation. Since then I have known nothing of the business. I could never bear to see the old place torn inside out and painted like a caravan to attract passers-by. I do not think my husband is happy to have it so, either; but he had no choice."

"You have a daughter — Harriet," he remarked quickly.

"How do you know?"

"I remember the young woman. She was investigating child labor in the canneries, wasn't she? I was the chairman of the committee that listened to her report."

His dark eyes twinkled with amusement, and Densie found herself laughing.

"She would do it — I was utterly shocked at the time. But she assured me it was part of her mission in life. I was taking my family seriously at that time. Now I am a mere spectator and I can see the humorous lining to all the serious clouds."

"Excellent! We all need your spectacles. These youngsters play a fine bag of tricks on us. I have never been able to forget her — a clever girl but a trifle inhuman. I think she would like the world to run on a time clock, an institutional system for families. I warrant she never quilted a bedspread."

Densie shook her head. "No; and my other girl never did anything but be a pretty, sentimental — goose." Her voice gravened.

"I must know said goose. And have you any sons?"

"One." Her face lighted with pride. "He is my great comfort. Ken and I have weathered the changing of fashions together, neither of us finding the other impossible in so doing. Daughters do find you impossible, you know — if your bonnets are not correct or you want to chaperone them!"

"How old are you, Densie Plummer?" he demanded. 'Just now you seem twenty-one. You've never lost youth, have you?"

"Why, I'm positively ancient!" Densie was amused at the reticence she found herself experiencing, now that her age was demanded.

"Fifty," said the senator brutally. "I'm fifty-four — so there!"

Densie pouted; she did it quite as well as Sally might have done.

"I've two more years before I reach the great divide — forty-eight."

"Isn't it splendid to be done with middle age?" he demanded boyishly. "Youth and old age are really the only times in the world. Middle age finds you taking yourself and everyone connected with you with utmost seriousness. You are bent on reforming the universe, achieving the height of perfection. You scold the young, pity the aged; you are narrow, orthodox in your conceit. Romance has no place in your scheme of things — that belongs to youth; youth and senile old chaps," he chuckled mischievously. "But after you blossom into Indian summer you learn that the sunset is more glowing and beautiful than the sunrise. Who can really enjoy life in a glaring noonday? I'm glad to be fifty-four; from now on I expect to be the gladdest, most sentimental old idiot who ever ate Densie Plummer's brown bread."

He saluted her across the table.

"Do say some more — it is just like a play!" she applauded.

"I'm beginning to recall the things of youth — now that the awful stress and battle of noonday are done! Why, I shouldn't be surprised if I just naturally hunted up my guitar and went serenading! My white hair excuses me anything, you see; and I've done some things in Washington that make the people call me their friend — and so I could go a long way before I was censored. Do enjoy sunset, Densie Plummer. You've

a tired look in your eyes that tells me the noonday must have been quite glaring and unromantic!"

At which he deftly changed the subject so as not to embarrass her. Before he left the exchange, loaded with purchases which he declared were just the sort of thing for which he had been looking, he asked Densie if she would care to be one of a national committee to inspect certain institutions. It paid a stipend, he explained — Densie thought it a generous wage — and she would have to travel. She said she hardly felt fitted for the post, at which he assured her that she was more fitted than any of the present committee, since she had the intuition of a homemaker and could spy out defects which no set of well-written reports could hide.

XXV

The senator left town the next day, but he sent Densie a farewell note renewing his promise to come to her tea room and that he would see she was appointed on the committee. And a week later the appointment came. It was quite impressive to receive the envelope without a stamp on it and read in formal terms the fact that she was a national committee woman and her district was such and such a place. She told John the news and asked him if he knew Senator Gleason and what was his opinion of him.

"He's the idealistic chap, I guess," John told her. "I never heard anything but good of him — only if he hadn't a fortune he could never have made his mark. That doesn't go in politics — I mean ideals. I can remember."

Densie was shocked at herself, for as John brought himself into the conversation she felt it was distinctly bad taste, and she was not interested in the subject. She also recalled finding several peculiar bills in the old secretary, bills payable to men of questionable occupation and character. But she did not mention it.

"We had lunch together at the exchange," she continued. "I never saw anyone like brown bread any better than he did. It was then he offered me the position. I found him delightful — with a boy's heart and the mind of a mellowed, wise man. He told me of his wife," she added quickly — she did not know just why. "His heart broke when she died."

"Ah," commented John, "but his appetite stayed intact — is that it?"

Densie flushed. She was going to ask John if he did not want to reduce his share of expenses still further, now that she had this extra income. She wanted to be fair to him, as fair as an ice-coated river with a deep current of love and loyalty can be. But she refrained.

She studied him as he sat uncomfortably in his chair. It was not a particularly comfortable chair — but for that matter none of the chairs had been designed for lounging or comfort. John's face had changed, he was too fat to be good looking — almost sleek. The reddish hair was sprinkled with gray; his smooth-shaven face had a wasted, lazy expression, she could not have told just what designated it, but it was paramount — perhaps it was the absence of any lines round his eyes or on his forehead. When he was a young man he had every indication of being one of those splendid, lean, elderly men who bespeak muscle and achievement, who have neither spared nor wasted their energies. He would have had well-defined lines across his forehead, telling of battles for the right, his eyes would have been slightly crisscrossed, as eyes should be at fifty, and he would have been someone whom a portrait painter would have taken a delight to have as a subject.

But the lines were not there — instead was a discontented expression about his mouth. Novelists always attribute to women these discontented mouths, but men have them quite as frequently — only they can be wise and grow a mustache to cover up what has happened.

His hands were not firm like the senator's, but flabby, and manicured, to please Iris; and he wore a showy ring. He was really aping Rex Humberstone. This man in his ultra-modish suit of check was not her John. She

tried to convince herself that the coating of ice was really all the river possessed — but she could not quite still the flowing current.

"I suppose you'll go on in public life until women get the vote; then you'll be chief of police." He spoke in that lackadaisical manner to hide ever-present masculine jealousy at his woman's doing anything outside her hearth.

Densie laughed off the joke — but the sting of his remark remained.

"Well, think how secure you could then feel," she answered quickly.

Senator Gleason happened to be in Densie's district when she was on her first inspection tour. She was inspecting orphanages, bringing to light neglected homey trifles and ferreting out unjust punishment or suggesting a more wholesome menu. She had such a gentle way of stating her complaint, of reading in the harsh faces of attendants their own tragedies and dissatisfactions and saying something appropriately soothing that they held no umbrage toward her when she took them to task. The former inspectors had been political grafters who just naturally "got" the appointment or single women with a mission in life, after Harriet's fashion. With her motherly easy way Densie seemed to gain results without inciting displeasure or causing rebellion. She could see the arguments on the side of the attended and the attendants — she would grow misty eyed when the orphan sang Jesus, Tender Shepherd, Lead Me; and when she listened to the matron's budget of woes that "nobuddy cares nuthin' about," the same mistiness would appear in her purplish eyes for the matron's satisfaction.

Altogether the senator had acted wisely by placing

Densie as he had, and if he chanced to be lingering about n his new touring car — the modern method of sere- ıading, as he boldly declared — and took her across the :ountry, talking to her eagerly, asking endless personal ıuestions about herself, while Densie planned great im- personal things in institutional reform — no one seemed to think anything about it except Densie and the senator.

What the senator thought showed in his face as he looked at Densie, and what Densie thought was a hope- less jumble of ideas — first a " wicked delight," as she named it, in knowing him; of having someone who really cared what you thought about the morning's editorials and wanted to be sure whether you took one or two lumps of sugar in your coffee, if you ever had headaches and if you did not think the exchange was too much for one small old-fashioned fairy — his name for Densie — and that you ought to sell it.

" I'm a boy and you're a girl," he said one day, " and we can play all we like. Isn't that ripping? Being a senator — you being Mrs. Densie Plummer — hides us from ruthless ridicule of the younger generation. They think we are planning a cheaper kind of Sunday pudding or lobster-colored shirts for the epileptic colony! .But we're not, are we? We are boy and girl, fifty-four and forty-eight, finished with noonday and watching the sun- set together! "

He would have said more if Densie had not forced him to discuss some practical topic.

He had asked her to bring her son and daughter and visit him at his winter home in Virginia, but she refused; and the subject of John was never mentioned. Densie felt she could not do so, just as John had once felt that Iris Starr had no right even to speak Densie's name. They always feel this way at the beginning — these

forty-eight-year-old girls and fifty-four-year-old boys prattling away of sunsets and Indian summer! But it soon evaporates and leaves them as thoughtlessly selfish as the younger generation who begrudge their elders having a wise and restraining finger in their romance.

Another time the senator had said abruptly, "Are you happy?"

Before she thought she answered, "I try to be — I try," and was immediately sorry that she had spoken. She wondered if he knew about Iris Starr and the rift between John and herself, but if he did he kept his own counsel like the gentleman he was. He sent Densie books and wrote her letters illustrated by his own pen-and-ink sketches and sometimes old-fashioned bouquets fit for only an old-fashioned fairy, but no one in the family noticed, because Densie had so many club women seeking her patronage that she was being deluged with offerings.

Returning from her second successful inspection trip — her exchange business all to be attended to, her club work behind, a hundred duties before her, as well as replenishing her wardrobe and visiting with her son while she pretended not to see the trapped look in Sally's eyes — Densie met John coming into the apartment with a peculiarly terrifying expression. He was white and shiny looking, as if he had been ill a long time, and he shuffled instead of properly lifting his feet.

"Oh, you're back," was all he said as he saw her. "Well — it's come. I've been expecting it."

"What?"

She started to kiss him, as was her custom. She felt an infinite tenderness for this wasted husband of hers, a pity which was impersonal and vast enough to extend even to the foolish woman who had entangled him.



"— blow into town presumably walking the ties and get a job at the factory, act as rough as I like and lay in wait to see if they are employing child labor." (*See page 125*)

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"I'm discharged," he said thickly, shuffling over to the mantel. "I'm not young and quick enough. I haven't money to keep buying their damned stock. Most of the young clerks turn back some of their salary each week. I hate the cursed store — the cheats! I don't care. I can get another job, but of course it won't be a manager's job —— Well, do you understand?"

"I am so sorry."

She spoke as gently as if he were a child. She was thinking with humorous dismay that she could have given John a position almost as good as the one he had held — he could have managed her exchange — but she would not offend his dignity, crippled though it was.

"Of course, I'd rather you did not work for them — I never wanted it, and it was never right."

"What else was there to do?" he said savagely. "I did all I could." He almost hated her for her success and his failure. "If I hadn't been saddled with a family ever since I was a stripling this would never have come. By the looks of things, Densie, our children will profit by our mistake. Sally and Harriet will not be drudges as you say you were — and the boy is all for himself, I've noticed."

"Ah, was it such a mistake?" she asked suddenly, the old deep current flowing very fast.

"I'm down and out." He did not notice the remark. "I've lost everything I have. I've a little stock in the place and they said"— his teeth bit his under lip until it was white —"they said, 'If you can't find another job we'll take you on as clerk in the spice department.' By God, they don't care how they grind a man down! I kept Hippler after he was deaf and half blind and insolent!"

"Why, you're young — at your prime!" Densie

spoke more to herself, because she was thinking of the senator. "What an insult that was to you!"

"I'll go out to-morrow and get a real job," he asserted proudly. "Watch me."

"You are welcome to anything I have ——"

"I'd starve first!" He almost snarled his refusal. He went away to seek out Iris Starr and be properly understood and comforted.

Late that night Densie returning from a theater party, inwardly disturbed by what had happened, found her husband huddled before the gas grate, looking even older and more decided. He did not say what was wrong — but she knew. Iris Starr had refused to comfort anyone who did not own sufficient stock in the Golden Rule to keep his position. Of course, she was sorry — and so fond of him — but she had to look out for herself first of all. He had better not come any more — it was just as well things had never been forced with his wife to the point of obtaining a divorce, for — here she had laughed gratingly — while she could support herself she could not support a husband, and from all reports his wife was capable of supplying him with all the comforts of home!

His world in wreckage about him John retraced his footsteps to his wife's apartment, gray and old of heart. Pride would not let him confess his own undoing. Certainly not to Densie, of whom he had demanded his freedom that he marry someone who understood him!

Two months later after an endless search for work John Plummer donned a white apron and stood behind a counter at The Golden Rule Tea Store, but his face grew thinner, lines timidly made their appearance across his forehead. He had really promoted himself in the biggest sense, only he did not yet realize what was hap-

pening. Densie's friends pitied her — "a grocer clerk for a husband, she's such a brilliant dear!"

And Densie accepted the situation with numbed indifference; pride held John from telling her half that was beginning to whisper itself to his starved, lonesome heart.

John's becoming a grocer clerk was a blow to Sally. It weakened her hold on Rex, she thought, just as Densie's prestige had undeniably strengthened it. Rex could no longer regard Densie as a little slug and pass her with a patronizing nod. He found Densie a modern woman with every whit as much ingenuity as he possessed, besides a courtesy and sincerity which had never been part of his make-up.

Rex accepted the transformation laughingly and told Sally it was a shame, and as soon as he found something really safe to play in stocks he was going to see that John Plummer made his pile. Rex had grown older looking in the last couple of years, he was more secretive as to his business, but his money had seemed to increase magically and he gave Sally very gorgeous trappings, things way beyond even a well-to-do man's means.

They had come to an understanding — a sort of "you've-got-me-there-is-no-use-trying-to-get-away" feeling. But Rex was no longer the adoring cavalier rejoicing in Sally's youth and beauty. He told her bluntly when her face was badly powdered or when she should have used rouge; he criticized her clothes and made fun of her painting. He delighted to point out various couples who had married at the time he had first known Sally and were burdened with youngsters and the cares of a home, and ask Sally if she would like to push a pram and have to buy liver and bacon to cook the next morning at six a. m.

Sometimes Sally would tell him very sharply that she

would, she hated suave, tip-seeking menials, richly spiced unwise food, endless extravagance and needless luxury, a veritable storybook way of living. Again she would realize that she had grown accustomed to ease, to living this sort of life, that she preferred to have no work to do, to eat and drink what she wished, wear what she liked, to have a sort of domineering influence over Rex and be pointed out as Rex Humberstone's fiancée wherever she went.

Sally thought that was all that was whispered about her, but the remarks were no longer as kind as they had once been. They ran: "Engaged for years, has no intention of marrying anyone, just likes to show her off." "She is pretty but hasn't she faded? Five years ago she was a beauty." "Watch and see; he'll grow tired of her if she nags at him, and I've heard that she did." "No, her mother can't do a thing; she is crazy-mad over him. Odd devil at that!"

During the latter part of 1913 Densie found herself taking a still further step in public work. She became interested in mysticism, unorthodox cults; she attended their meetings and went to mediums and investigated their methods. She did not become a follower of them, but they held her attention and she was amused at their claims. A New York paper in which the senator was interested asked her to write her opinions of the various cults which had gained a foothold in America, and she began her series with a daring title: America's Menace, which created quite a bit of excitement and approval.

The paper paid her well and gave her untold prominence. She enjoyed both — she was beginning to be proud of being known as Mrs. Densie Plummer, fame was very sweet to possess, and she caught herself attempting the doing of artificial tricks to foster it. And

though she was somewhat ashamed she did not stop the doing of them.

All the while John Plummer's face grew thin and lined, but he stoically wore his white apron and measured out spices with an unsteady hand — for he found his panacea in drink; and Densie, who was hardly aware of the change in him, only thought of him when it was necessary, which John took pains was as seldom as possible.

Once he laid a clipping on her desk which began, "Join the Only Her Husband's Club"; and when she returned it to him she said gravely, "I wish you would take charge of the exchange. It has grown to such an extent it really needs a man."

"Oh, then women can't do everything?" he retorted.

"We never claimed we could; we claimed we can do things as well. Why won't you, John?" And she mentioned an ample salary.

"I'd starve before I'd go to work for my wife." He rose abruptly, kicking away a footstool. "And don't begin the old harangue"— he lifted his unsteady hand — "I'm damned if I'll listen to any more of women's wrongs."

"You've been drinking!"

"Who wouldn't?"

Densie shrugged her shoulders. The coating of ice came to the rescue of the deep current. She turned to Kenneth for consolation. Kenneth regarded his mother as the only person who could do no wrong, partly because he saw the same idea reflected in Densie's dark blue eyes whenever she looked at him.

Just after this incident another honor came to Densie; she was named chairman of the National Eugenics Committee and asked to write her experiences as a state in-

spector. Even Harriet was stirred by this, and advised her mother not to be a sob sister and have anything sentimental embodied with her arguments. Oddly enough, Harriet was to be one of the critics of the report.

"Well, it's getting too much for me," Sally told her father that night, "I've a limited brain — and just now I feel as if I ought to go out and have a sensible talk with the horse."

The two disgruntled ones spent a wretched evening indulging in semi-treasonous remarks and dire prophecies.

XXVI

Shunted into a backwater of life John turned to his health as the most interesting topic and recreation. He was annoyed when Sally joked about his leakage of the heart and when Kenneth left samples of patent medicine on his dresser he felt as aggrieved and misunderstood as any woman invalid trying to convince her doctor as to the state of her nerves. Densie ignored the thing, which was the most cutting of all.

She saw her husband only a few moments each day and she had unconsciously become like Harriet, sweetly courteous and blandly impersonal whenever she met him. Things did not affect her — the coating of ice over the deep current was thicker and more permanent. As Densie had one time ardently desired nothing but benefits for her family, labored with her hands, prayed with her soul and loved with all her heart, she now diverted the same amount of material and spiritual energy toward her own advancement and the affairs of persons outside her house. She worked for her orphans and her blind and tubercular victims zealously, she pointed out faults and praised virtues with an equal evenness of temper, she conducted the presidency of clubs with admirable executive ability, stumped for suffrage throughout the state and made an unprecedented record, for she was neither assertive, masculine nor sentimentally emotional — just an old-fashioned fairy, as the senator said — and who could resist her?

Mrs. Densie Plummer became known as the exception to the rule, no one minded when she asked for favors,

because she always asked with a "please" and received with a "thank you."

The senator was proud of Densie; he boasted she was his champion find. Densie used to try to persuade herself this meant nothing out of the ordinary to have him say it, but she had to admit to her truthful self that this boyish white-haired man of fifty-four had come to mean a great deal. She thought of him before she thought of anyone else except Kenneth. And when she thought of Kenneth she always thought of James Gleason, because he had promised Densie to see that Kenneth had the West Point appointment and could begin to be a captain, his fondly cherished dream. She also thought that the senator's influence would be good for Kenneth, he needed such an idealistic yet strong man to copy. Then she would reprove herself and remember John Plummer. Poor John was engrossed by a new eye trouble, grumbling over the white linen apron he donned every morning at eight-fifteen! When she came to this point she would try to stop her reflections about Kenneth and think of someone else — say, Harriet.

She could understand Harriet's viewpoint now, and she was proud of the girl though anxious as to her health. In another two years the senator said he would have her appointed for the study of eugenics and sent abroad — the senator was so kind, he knew not only what to say but what to do. He had told her of his old home, hinting it was very lonesome these days and that the big rooms were waiting with their priceless antiques for a mistress, that the garden was a mass of roses and an old sunken fountain bubbled away in the sunlight while dragon flies glittered about a little statue of Pan —— Here Densie would try to collect herself again, for she was still thinking of the senator.

She would turn her thoughts to Sally, and the deep mother current of anxiety and resentment would begin to stir — beautiful wasted Sally going her foolish squirrel-cage way — over and over, the eternal round of useless drives and dinners and forced places. Densie's face would grow stern as she visualized Rex — a sneaking coward, she called him — who had hypnotized her child and shut her away from everything normal, the things for which Sally had been destined. Well, the senator had guessed this worry and promised if the time came when he could be of use in handling Mr. Humberstone he was sure not to fail. The senator had a cure for every ill, a smile to erase every frown ——

Densie would stop again. Then she would fall to planning her new clothes, but unconsciously they would comply with the style and color the senator had said he liked best. It was impossible to stop thinking of him as the central figure in her life. She could not help but contrast him with Iris Starr — for the senator had done everything for Densie with no hope of reward, while Iris Starr flattered John and then discarded him like a worn-out glove the instant reverses were his lot.

Could she have done any differently? The vista of years would stretch before her and she would often pass down them figuratively, recalling memories and events of each one, ending way, way back at the happiest day of her life, when she made a bit of a biscuit under Ellen Porch's kindly guidance, and looked out the window to see John astride his pony, killing lions and tigers in the kitchen garden.

It bothered Densie most of the time that John held a clerk's position. Her false sense of pride, created since her own honors and position had become of importance, chafed at the thought of her husband's answer-

ing flat voices as to the price of paprika and cinnamon. Yet, if she suggested that he retire or try again to find something more congenial, she saw that he had become a self-inflicted martyr — his heart condition and his white linen apron were to him as a monk's horsehair shirt. He rather gloried in his downfall. Had Iris Starr stayed in his life all might have been different, but left to himself while Densie forged ahead John's afflictions became his friends, and Densie saw that he would wear his white apron and take heart medicine until he, *per se,* saw fit to do otherwise.

"It is just that you would be happier, John," she had urged.

"You're ashamed of me," he snarled.

Densie smiled, remembering the years John had been ashamed of her — that fatal New York trip, for example.

"It doesn't look dignified," she assured him.

"The senator or your friends don't trade at the Golden Rule," he answered with martyred satisfaction; "and Sally and Ken never pass by on that side of the street."

Densie hesitated. "John, suppose we try really to talk it over?"

"I'm all out of heart drops," he would answer, consulting a medicine stand. "I'll have to go to the drug store right away."

And with relief Densie would allow the conversation to end.

Densie earned even more money that year by doing special investigating work for the consumers' league — she became quite intimate with Harriet via letter, and Harriet found that her mother was mentioned in the

circles which she respected as a woman of authority and influence.

Another peculiar incident happened just at this time. Instead of writing to Densie, Dean Laddbarry began writing to John, or rather John answered one of Densie's letters as she requested, and a correspondence sprang up between the older man and Dean, with John telling all the news, after the fashion of a woman, and hinting of his wrongs in clumsy masculine fashion. He grew dependent on Dean's cheer-o letters written about his business in the West and his liking for the life and the country. Occasionally, not so frequently as before, he would ask about Sally; to which John would reply briefly: "Sally's fine; some day or other I suppose she'll get married."

Sally never knew this. She knew Dean wrote her father, but pride refused to let her read the letters or answer them. She had developed pride as her horsehair shirt, just as John had the heart leakage and the white apron. Kenneth and Densie were free from horsehair shirts, each busy living in the world and happy with each other. But to Sally — she was twenty-eight now — had come a peculiar vanity and reticence about herself and Rex Humberstone. She was neither proud nor reserved with Rex, she had bad scenes in which she stormed or upbraided him for being engaged and never intending marriage and threatened him that he dare not break off the affair — loving him all the while with that wild, starved infatuation which no one has ever been able to understand or justify!

The truth was that Rex Humberstone was not afraid of Sally, but of Densie Plummer; he realized her influence. He had seen her with Senator Gleason, whom he

always avoided, and he felt it was better to weather Sally's storms than to tell her he did not love her and let her go weeping to her modern mother's arms. He had the uncomfortable feeling that his years of belittling Sally's mother might play boomerang.

Besides, some of the time Sally was fair company and she was still beautiful, and he was altogether too old and too engrossed on a new and lucrative mission to take time for younger women — he had trained Sally and was content to let it so stay.

For a long time the conversation between Sally and her mother had been confined to " when I will be home " and " when I won't be home " and arguments over the honesty of a cleaning woman. Sally had become a semi-secretary-housekeeper, such as she was, with Densie paying her fifty dollars a month and allowing her that for clothes and incidentals. Sally had long ago given up trying to paint for a living; she admitted now with a bitter laugh that it was a girlish notion and amounted to nothing. She told her mother's friends and her own, what few she still had, that she preferred staying home and looking after things, and she accepted Densie's allowance without a qualm, telling herself that the few notes she wrote or bills she paid deserved her wage.

Kenneth, who was finishing school, was engaged by the senator at sixty dollars a month to do some sort of clerical work, no one really knew just what; but he went to the senator's office every day after school hours and busied himself with various matters, chiefly answering the phone and reading the latest magazines while ensconced in a comfortable leather chair.

John had said, " I worked for my uncle for a dollar a week when I was a boy," when Kenneth told him of the position.

"You're growing old, daddy," his son informed him. "You're beginning to talk about the past — that's what you said about Uncle Sam Hippler."

"Senators didn't hire sixty-dollar-a-month office boys then."

"Didn't they? If they knew the office boys' bully mummies?" Kenneth finished in innocent triumph.

At which John's face turned a mottled color and he took an extra dose of heart drops.

John's salary was twenty dollars a week. Out of this he paid ten toward the apartment expenses, a drop in the bucket in reality. The rest was used for medicines and his clothes. He wore rather goodlooking clothes and took a melancholy pride in his appearance.

"The really sick people never show how ill they are," he was wont to remark.

But Densie paid all the rest of the bills, which she was glad to do under the circumstances.

XXVII

Mrs. Plummer was surprised to have Sally accost her one morning to ask, "Do you know any regular position I could take? I'm tired of licking postage stamps and seeing that the cleaning woman doesn't rob our silver chest. I want to try to really do something."

Though the coating of ice was solid and of long standing the warm current underneath prompted Densie to say with unusual tenderness, "What would you like to do? You are not the sort to pin down to routine. As long as you stay at home it does not matter, but strangers insist on regularity."

Sally began fidgeting among the papers on her mother's desk. "I would be regular," she promised, strangely chagrined at asking this favor. "Oh, mummy, I'm weary of being called Rex's fiancée and knowing we will never marry! There is a lot of that sort of tragedy going on these days. It's worse than if you married someone that was horrid or that died—you'd have the legal right to show emotion. But I'm supposed to be 'lucky Sally Plummer'—and I hate myself and my wasted years and—this ring."

Tears came into her eyes.

Densie reflected a moment. "It is too late to bother over what is done." She forced herself to speak sharply. "I'll see about a position. You are not equipped for anything. If you could typewrite or sew or had ever developed any one talent or ability."

"I've spent my best years trimming hats with which

to charm a roué," the girl said honestly. "I can't refuse to speak the truth any longer."

"Why not stay here then? You are useful, Sally. It would never do for me to get a position for you and have you fail to make good or leave it." Densie was thinking of her own reputation.

"I'd not be a credit to you, would I?" Sally's black brows drew together in a straight line. She picked up a letter and glanced curiously at it. "You have come on, mummy — this chummy sort of thing from the vice regent of the D. A. R., and your two personal letters from the President — you have come on." She rose wearily, as Densie used to after a long day in the household. "I suppose it is too late to start again, isn't it?"

"If you'd give up Rex," her mother said, halfway hoping; "couldn't you, Sally? Now that you realize the truth?"

Sally dropped her head. "He's a habit now — a dreary, deadly habit, a veritable gray wolf! I'd be lost without him, I'm afraid. I'm not blaming anyone but myself — only I was very young and I cared so hard."

Densie was going to add, "And you would not let your mummy find out about him"; but she refrained. What was done was done, and what is is. She had ceased believing in the old orthodox religions. She had stopped praying; she held the thought instead. She had broken away from the faith of her fathers and the duties of her birthright. After many years of struggle she had succeeded in making the old club speech come true as concerned herself — "to enjoy life and therefore justify her own existence." In the sense life she had convinced herself lay life's greatest and deepest meaning — and she lived accordingly. The optimistic anæsthesia

with which these modern shallow cults inspire their followers and urge them to adopt had become Densie's as well: Everything is all right, there is nothing but good in the world, and infinite plenty, there is no need to take heed for the morrow — do not admit the possibility of any catastrophe or lack of worldly goods and gains!

And Densie lived accordingly.

Sally moved away. A sudden impulse made Densie add: "Sally, if Rex were to ask you to marry him now — knowing all you do, would you say yes?"

And she was terrified at the wild joy that came into the tired, lovely face.

"Oh, mummy, that would be a miracle!" Sally said softly.

So Densie straightway began to hold the thought to force the marriage to take place. She met the senator that afternoon at a reception. He had planned his arrival to coincide with hers, and after formal greetings to a few satellites and polite bows to the unwashed — those still suffering from cabin fever and at the stage where Densie had been when she volunteered to make the biscuit for the Opera Reading Club — they found themselves outdoors in their hostess's charming garden, the warm May day making summer seem close at hand.

"By Georgia, you are lovely!" the senator began ardently. He was looking at Densie's eyes, as violety as any heroine's this day. Her frock was a short-skirted old rose satin and she wore pearls for contrast. A floppy lace hat completed the creation.

"You look just twenty-one," he insisted chivalrously.

"Sh-h, and you know my age," she warned.

"I thought we could pick our own ages when we played — like children do when they say, 'I am the king and you are the queen'— isn't that the idea?"

"What a boy you are! I don't believe you'll ever stop playing. It is very enticing, but it makes me want to play always as well, and ——"

She paused, at once conscious that she had betrayed herself.

"Don't you know how lonesome I am?" he began, putting his hand on hers.

"Please, please, my dear — we are staid, middle-aged persons — I with grown children and you with blessed memories."

She stood up and began to point out the sky line.

"Then tell me what I can do for you. I'm never happy these last two years unless I'm doing something for Densie Plummer," he begged.

"Jim, if we could get Sally straightened out," she said, sitting down again. She had called him by his first name for more than a year.

"Is it that cad of a Humberstone she still wants?"

Densie nodded. "It is the one great love of her heart — she is like myself. Torn and tattered as it may be, disgraced and irregular, it is there — way deep!"

The senator's eyes flashed dangerously. "Is it right to cling to these torn and tattered loves, my dear?"

"It may not be right, but it is not in our hands — not for such women as Sally and me."

"How does she know she cares for him — that she could not come to see the contrast?"

"I used to hope for it, but the boy who loved her enough to understand and overlook her foolishness with Rex has gone away and has made a place for himself. Men don't remember for years — particularly when a girl has laughed at their love and then sent them away. That is what my Sally did."

"Suppose," said the senator thoughtfully, "I find out

more about Rex; perhaps we can convince Sally that she is safer with her mother."

"Jim, you'd try to capture the moon for me, if I asked you; I never used to dream of being such a captivating old lady!"

"If I do — capture the moon, let us say — what is my reward? Will you let me speak? You know I have wanted to for a long time."

"Oh, no!" She stood up abruptly. "I cannot listen any more."

"You mean you don't dare," he corrected, catching up to her. "Well, I can wait. I've waited two years now."

Something in the way he spoke reminded her of Dean Laddbarry's patient whole-souled manner, and for the first time she understood Sally's tragedy, the impossibility of loving someone ever and ever so much worthier, perhaps, than the one to whom your heart is given. Yet such is the way of women!

XXVIII

In July Harriet came up for a vacation. It was the first satisfactory vacation she had ever spent with her family. The apartment being too small to accommodate a guest — shades of those stately guest rooms at The Evergreens which always welcomed everyone! — so she took a room at a near-by hotel and visited with her family at her own convenience.

Densie and her elder daughter had much in common, though Harriet disliked her mother's display of clothes and her pink-tea side of life. Densie liked the clothes and the pink teas; she deliberately planned for them. She enjoyed coming fashionably late into a warm candle-lighted, flower-scented room with every prominent woman in the city waiting to exclaim over her, and the flock of cabin-fever victims to gaze with awe and admiration. She liked taking an eggshell cup of tea and half a macaroon and standing in the center of the floor to tell easily yet forcibly of the President's last letter, and Jane Addams' invitation to visit Hull House, and the work she had just completed along the lines of eugenics. Densie used almost to laugh at herself while she was doing this — but it never stopped her from continuing.

And at the proper moment Senator James Gleason was announced, only to hurry by the receiving line to reach Densie and say tenderly: "Thank goodness you've come! Where can we have a talk? I'm hungry to see you."

She liked it when the hostess would say, "Thank you so much for coming, Mrs. Plummer. You made my little affair a success." Which was, in a large measure, the truth. She knew how to meet and analyze people, to make them like her without winning the description of being ostentatious or self-pushing. Former satellites like Mrs. Worthington Prescott and Mrs. Naomi Winters were given but a brief nod, which was all their position in clubdom entitled them to have. She knew people said that her husband was beneath her and never mentioned him in her presence, but laid special stress on Harriet's brilliancy and Kenneth's promise of success — just like his dear little mother.

Whenever Densie entertained she did it at the best hotel in some white-and-gold parlor with an array of white-capped maids and uniformed bell hops to do her bidding. She enjoyed the frothy side of her life.

Harriet smiled at it indulgently and consented to have a luncheon given for her, at which she heard nothing but her mother's praises sung between bites of salad and sips of fruit punch.

Sally and Harriet stayed away from each other as much as it was possible. Sally realized that in Harriet's eyes she was still the jellyfish, and Harriet looked at Sally as an economic waste and devoted her energies to inspiring Kenneth with socialistic ideas. For the first time Harriet took an interest in Kenneth. For her father she bought cigars and slippers and kissed him gingerly on his cheek at parting. "Poor daddy," she said — as she had once said, "Poor mummy!"

She told Leila upon her return, "Daddy is a sort of high-class low-brow — if you know what I'm driving at. His tastes and ideas run to cribbage, pedro, detective stories, poems that rhyme, thick steaks, musical come-

lies and good ready-made suits and a vacation spent at a sanitarium! Now mummy has become a low-class high-brow — smart frocks, the latest popular essays, golf, formal hotel affairs, social dramas and national committees, tours of the Yellowstone."

And though she did not add anything more she was thinking that she herself was a high-class highbrow, given over to crumpled linen smocks, diet sheets, Egyptology, prison reform, monotone song cycles and walking trips through Norway! She was not at all sure as to Sally and Kenneth.

Leila agreed with her, as usual; and having unpacked her trunk and her mind at the same time Harriet took up her round of duties.

War broke out the week following her return. After the first horror, yet approval, Densie found added activities given into her keeping. She was made chairman of the National Relief Work, and before three months elapsed she decided to make the third drastic move. She sold the exchange outright for a very fair sum, and they adjourned to a hotel without a pretense of a home such as the flimsy little kitchenette. They had their own rooms, disconnected, and a living room for Densie's special use. Every old thing was thrown away that had strayed into the apartment-house locker. The furniture was taken to a hotel because the rooms had looked shabby to Densie's mind. But at last they were on a final basis of living, she told everyone. She did not have to wonder who cleaned the windows or if the electric toaster was in working order. From being the mainstay of a house-and-garden existence Densie Plummer had finally re-ordered her life so that the only domestic duty confronting her was to lock away her perfumes from beauty-loving chambermaids.

Maude Hatton died in the asylum the day after they moved, and Sally was commissioned to take flowers and act as chief mourner. She delegated someone else in her place; funerals made her creepy, she explained to her mother. With slight regret Densie dismissed the matter from her mind. The war promised to crowd her days and nights to overflowing, and she had no time to become maudlinly sentimental. She was almost amused at John's grave face when he heard the news about the old lady. She did not know until long afterward that he had been Sally's understudy at the funeral.

XXIX

The first year of the war brought Densie nothing but success and honors, for she showed her capability under the great stress and turmoil. She became indifferent to the social side of her club life, it was all relief work, which she organized and conducted on astoundingly gigantic lines. She wrote stirring appeals to the people, directed a campaign by which she raised enormous funds, and was given a letter of warmest appreciation by the French President.

Other interests were secondary and faint. She scarcely thought of her clothes or her former pleasures. While France ran scarlet she could do nothing but aid the suffering. The senator was no whit behind her in his efforts. He had helped Densie somewhat into her positions, but she merited his so doing. She was looked upon as the leader in war-relief work — as well as having the courage to predict and hope for America's entrance into the strife, to declare herself with the Allies and to prepare people for sacrifice and thrift.

"I cannot be neutral," she was quoted as saying. "I see but the one position for America — hide-and-go-seek-a-Hun! As soon as the national pulse permits, the leaders will see that this position is assumed."

Which attitude lost her many followers and gained her many staunch friends. John and Densie came to open argument concerning this issue. John took the attitude, "It is their war over there — let them settle it. Don't go sending our boys to be killed for them." To which

Densie with unprecedented fury told him he was a coward and asked if he would not fight for civilization if he could be convinced that civilization and ideals were the issues at stake?

"Yes, if I could be convinced," he said, "but I'm not." And he went over his straw arguments, which Densie swept aside by forceful statements of the truth.

"We'll not mention the war, then," John ended hotly. "I've got a right to my opinion, even if I am Mrs. Densie Plummer's husband!"

So Densie agreed. She saw no economically useful thing John could do, so there was no purpose in trying to convert him. He was so personal about this war, whereas the great thing was to be impersonal and think of oneself last.

Besides, something happened in the family which completely distracted Densie for the time being. Rex Humberstone and Sally were married.

Sally had come to her mother as soon as she returned from a busy afternoon of appointments. As soon as Densie saw her she was startled — there was an almost girlish look of happiness on Sally's face, and the cynicism had faded from the eyes.

"You must take time to listen to me," she begged as if she were a child again.

"What has happened — you seem so happy? Come in my room while I slip on a negligee and lie down for forty winks — I've a dinner on to-night."

"No, you cannot go to the dinner. You have something more important close at hand," Sally almost sang the words, she fairly danced into her mother's room, shutting the door and standing with her back against it. "Guess — can't you? Like you used to when we were little?"

"This must be some extraordinary happening. I haven't seen you like this for years," Densie laid her wraps aside. "Do tell me instanter."

"Rex wants to marry me as soon as I will." There was a quiver in Sally's voice. She was all Sally Plummer again, the Sally who was born cuddled and who loved to be alive to just see what would happen next.

"Rex Humberstone!" Densie spoke his name incredulously; she did not understand his sudden romantic spurt. It had been so long since she had actually worried about it or spent sleepless nights in prayer that it was like turning back the calendar. She did not like the sensation.

"You see, mummy, he was away on business." Sally awkwardly picked up her mother's beringed hand, highly manicured and even whiter than Sally's, and tried to fondle it. But she did not come to nestle in Densie's arms as she had been taught to do. No one nestled in Densie's arms, not even the orphans for whom she valiantly fought for proper living conditions. "He was ill while he was at a hotel and he said he suddenly felt that he had been wasting time and he loved me more than he ever realized and he wondered very humbly, he said"—the gold eyes were pitiful in their proud delight—"if it was too late to ask me to be his wife. And mummy darling, you must know how happy I am—right here—in the heart of me. I wouldn't care if Rex were a hundred years old, he would still be Rex Humberstone, and he wants me for his wife!"

She closed her eyes to hide tears; but Densie saw them.

Undecided as to her attitude Densie said quickly, "So he has taken eleven years to be sure he loves you—eleven years and an attack of grippe, I presume, in a hotel with a bell hop as his only solace."

She shrugged her trim little shoulders in as superior fashion as Harriet herself could have done.

Sally opened her eyes to stare at her. "Mummy, how can you — how dare you? You've no right to speak of my husband in that way."

"I cannot help speaking the truth. I cannot approve of such a marriage. I thought you were disillusioned yourself, merely keeping up appearances. If you wanted to be a trained nurse for the aged I could have secured you a much better position in a state institution."

Densie regretted the words as soon as they were spoken. But it was too late. It was really the conflict between her warm mother's heart protesting at her child's degrading herself by such an alliance and Densie's newly acquired personality — a showy, clever, hard personality, excellent armor for these warm, mother hearts, it is true. So often an acquired personality is at constant war with one's own self!

"I shall not bother you again." The cynical look returned to Sally's eyes.

"When will you be married?" Densie asked quickly.

"As soon as I can be ready," was the retort.

"I will buy your clothes ——"

"I wish none of your money. My husband can provide properly for me." Sally hesitated, then all the faded-young in her shamed and injured self rose to the surface. "And if we have taken eleven years to know our own minds"— already she had generously substituted the pronoun we for I —"we shan't be as liable to come a cropper as you seem to have done. After all, mummy," she ended with a mocking little laugh, "it is a bit thick, at your age, to be tied to a grocer clerk while

a perfectly good United States senator is ready to lay down and die for you."

After which she flounced out of the room, banging the door.

Densie tried to control her temper. This was modern respect for parents; this clear-sighted, brutal, slangish analysis of things of one's heart. For a long time the warm flowing current struggled to conquer the coating of ice, but the ice won. Densie's new personality was paramount. She lay down to rest and try to sleep, but she kept thinking that she must buy Sally proper clothes and give her a proper wedding. She supposed they would live at a hotel, which would be the best thing as Sally did not know how to keep house. Densie must have a new gown for the wedding, and John new clothes. It would be satisfactory in a certain measure to be able to refer to, "My daughter, Mrs. Humberstone." Densie had learned how to say such things within earshot of the proper persons and at the proper time. If Sally so loved this man that she was willing to wait in wretched loneliness all her days rather than marry anyone else — perhaps it was better that she be unhappily married. It was better for Densie because it took Sally completely off her hands. Harriet would never be married — that was to be expected, and Densie approved of Harriet's career. But Sally, who had given her heart too generously and had done nothing of account, it was better to have Sally off her hands.

She wondered what John would say about it. Very likely indifferent, since he had begun to pity himself with such gusto and also to locate new and complicated complaints. A liver trouble furnished him with food for speculation Saturday half holidays. Besides, nothing he

might say would matter — which he knew, and which might partially explain his indifference. Densie smiled as she thought of John, for she recalled the report of Iris Starr's recent marriage to a successful merchant, and John's discomfiture when the news had reached him. Densie had seen that the paper was hanging over his chair arm!

With Sally married — here Densie began to plan for Sally's wedding dress and her own costume and for Sally's rooms and to think of all the good things she could about Rex and try to soften and excuse the bad — there was really only her beloved boy and herself to consider in the future. Life was rather satisfactory, take it all in all — if one learned how to play the game.

Densie glanced about her room, contrasting it with the Peep o' Day Room at the Little House, with the carved black-walnut set and the marble-topped dresser, the family portraits, the framed wedding certificate and sampler, the old round table with the double-burner lamp, the plate of knives and apples for John's repast; how he would sit in a big chair beside the table, peeling his bedtime apple and saying, "Well, mother, I met a man to-day that we both know." And Densie on the opposite side of the table would stop her sewing to answer, "Tell me who he was, dear!"

She shook her head. The contrast was indeed a vivid one. The bedroom had just been done over to suit Densie's latest notion — the chairs were Chinese blue with silver-thread embroidery and the dressing table and bed of gilt with handsome tapestry drapes and coverings. Her dressing table sparkled with silver-backed brushes and silver-topped bottles as gayly as any actress' — indeed, her make-up box quite resembled a Broadway

star's. She had artificial roses in a handsome vase, and fresh cut flowers which the senator had sent her. Her costumer showed elaborate, daintily made garments. The pictures on the walls were artistically framed prints and a photograph of the senator and one of Kenneth. The rugs were small affairs, like velvet and of Persian pattern, and there was an elaborate hammered-copper chafing dish and vacuum bottle on a stand. This was all that remained of Densie's one-time well-ordered and hospitable kitchen! Bookcases were piled with reading matter and a dainty lamp was beside her bed. Her negligee was a creamy, silky thing with old-gold tassels and slippers to match, and she smiled with contented pride as she looked across into the pier glass, where she could see herself reflected.

"Oh, mum, are you in?" Kenneth's newly acquired lusty bass roared the words from without.

Densie's face brightened. "Oh, son, I am," she answered gayly.

He burst into the room. "I didn't mean to disturb you," he began — he was in the toils of getting dressed for the evening and was wrestling with that blight on masculine civilization, the refractory collar button — "only Sally is in one of her high-steppers and won't speak to me and I'm late now. Can you fix it? Ah, thanks, mummy." He sat on the edge of the bed while Densie rose and stood before him to fasten the collar deftly into place.

"There, my dear — you look very nice. By the way, did Sally tell you any news?"

She gazed at him fondly. Kenneth at twenty had the poised appearance of twenty-five. Contrary to his father's pessimistic belief that he was to be a man milliner

or a tenor he had developed into a tall athletic person with very golden hair, much to his horror, deeply set dark eyes and a square, blue-black chin.

"No; she just remarked I was naught but a low order of animal life or words to that effect, so I beat it — I suppose she's rowed with Rex again."

"No — with mother," said Densie mischievously. These two were always a trifle closer than any other two persons, since they could discuss anything and be sure to remain friends.

"What was up — wanted another hat?"

"No; she's to marry Rex soon." Densie waited for his verdict.

He whistled softly. "If she's going to marry him — it's good-by, Sally. I can see it all now. Six months of Rex and Sally will hate him." Kenneth frowned. "Didn't you tell her that?"

"I suggested that eleven years is ample time for a middle-aged man to make up his mind to marry a girl — but it seems that it was all brought about by his being ill in a hotel and he felt he was getting old and it would be rather convenient to have Sally about. Ken, I wish you were older than your sister; you might have influenced her long ago."

"No one can influence anyone that's in love," Kenneth told her patronizingly. "It is Sally's problem — and a pretty dance she's led us all for a long time. Do you remember," he chuckled, "the day you came home from New York and Sally had just met him and I told you he reminded me of the wealthy black dog? I've never changed my idea, even if he is my future brother-in-law."

"We must make the best of it — and don't try to argue with her."

"Who ever argues with old maids?" Kenneth

boldly helped himself to a little of his mother's best cologne. "Poor old Sally, that's what she is — I cannot see the fun of loving someone like Rex." Kenneth grew strangely dreamy.

Densie was quick to catch the expression. "Are you in love, dear?" And despite this new and shielding personality of hers and this wonderful ice coating as armor for her own warm heart and flowing current she felt strangely pained — and jealous of the girl whom Kenneth should love.

"I'm halfway in love"— he came to put his arms round her —"but I've watched Sally for a long time, and I made up my mind, mummy, not to go falling in love like she did unless the other chap is going to care just a little too. It is too tough on — on everybody." He beamed down at his mother from his six-foot supremacy. "You've changed lots, mummy, because of Sally —more than you know; and because of father and that fool of an Iris Starr. I can understand now."

"Who is she?"

Densie's past problems and present readjusted conditions seemed like tissue paper against an iron wall as compared to Kenneth's loving someone more dearly than herself.

"She's a little blonde girl — Geraldine Poole — very, very beautiful — but she's not given me much encouragement. She is twenty too. I can't seem to find out how I stand. I'm not going to make her love me unless she wants to — it does not pay for anyone to do that in the long run. I'm going right ahead and get my appointment through the senator and learn to be the best officer in the world, because I've the best mummy to be proud of me — haven't I? And I'm proud of you, mummy — and all you've done ——"

"You're only twenty, darling, and that is so young."

"Dad was married then," the boy reminded.

"But it was different ——"

"Well, is the new sort of different about such things better than the old?"

"I stopped wondering about it, my boy; it was ruining my complexion," she forced herself to say lightly; "and with a new romance in the making and Sally's wedding at hand I've a lot to do and think about."

"I wonder if you'll ever marry again?" he asked suddenly.

"Kenneth!"

"You know I mean the senator — he loves you very much," he told her in a confidential, modern fashion, as if he were telling a classmate, "but I don't believe — somehow — that you will. I don't know why. You've every reason in the world — I know dad hasn't made good — but ——"

Densie was silent. When a child and a parent begin to criticize and openly discuss the other parent the dignity of the relationship is shattered. So Densie was silent, standing tiptoe to kiss her tall young son.

"My day is over," she said softly; "I've other things I must satisfy myself with!"

"But if he asks you, mummy," the boy ended impulsively, "be good to him, because he cares so hard. It must be rough to let yourself care hard and have it end in defeat."

"It is," his mother supplemented quietly.

XXX

That night Densie found John sitting alone in the little salon — it was no longer disgraced by the title of living room — reading papers and tossing them restlessly on the floor. He wore a frayed dressing gown; he had others, but he clung without rhyme or reason as men do to one certain dressing gown or one particularly distressing necktie, refusing to abandon them until they are taken unawares by a scheming wife and a willing clothes peddler. His grizzled hair had turned quite white and there were more harsh new lines across his forehead. John had become gruff in manner, brief, almost sullen and seldom given to expressing an opinion.

"Oh, hello," he said tersely as she came in. "Sam Hippler is dead — I got a letter to-day."

"Really?" Densie sat in a chair opposite him, throwing back her evening cloak and showing a silver-brocaded geranium satin gown which suited her well. "I'm so glad — he's been childish a long time, his niece has written. What a wonderful constitution he must have had!"

"Poor old Sam, he tried hard to keep me in the old ways." John gave an unpleasant laugh. "I suppose you had a good time," he added lamely.

"No; a very serious time. The governor was there and I had a personal audience with him about pardoning the two boys sentenced to the chair. I think I shall win my point, but not without effort ——"

"I suppose the senator will help." John's lips folded

into a thin line; it robbed his face of the last glimmer of pleasantness left to it.

"He will do everything he can; still, he is not the governor. I am particularly anxious to gain my point, because I firmly believe that one boy is a mental defective and that the other was intoxicated at the time of the shooting." Densie became lost in reflection.

"I had a good time to-day, too — I got a cut in salary. I can't tote barrels into the cellar if a delivery man has suddenly left or attract the younger women's patronage! They'd like to get rid of me — so they're trying the best they can. Rotten, cheating firm and methods! Why, the stuff they sell people, Densie, is ridiculous to call by any dignified name such as tea and coffee, and Uncle Herbert would have considered their extracts poison. I don't see how they can get it across."

"Of course," Densie said in a very preoccupied manner. Any mention of the store or John's affairs irritated her; she had once longed to be told any details, but the pendulum had swung to the other extreme. "How much did they cut you?"

"To fifteen a week — and in these times! Jolly, isn't it?" He threw the newspapers off his lap. "By God, this is no age for an old man — or woman!" he said forcibly. "I wish I had Sam Hippler's wooden overcoat."

"Don't speak in such a fashion," Densie told him sharply.

Coming from a perfectly appointed public banquet at which she sat next the governor and had been toastmistress, with the senator at her side to whisper the right thing at the right moment and to drive her home — to come into her own box of a place, supported by herself, and find as a welcome this disgruntled, unlovely hus-

hand, sullen and weary and jealous through no fault of hers, it seemed — was it quite fair? Ought she to continue conditions?

"I never speak in a way to please you, do I?" He turned to look at her directly. She had not really looked at John for a long time, and she saw that his eyes were dead looking — it rather startled her.

"We no longer agree, that is all. I speak to please other people, but never you — and it is the same with yourself."

"I'm in the way," he said coarsely, standing up before the mantel. "A shabby old clerk and a brilliant clubwoman were never meant to use the same latchkey. Once "— his face grew flushed and she knew what it cost him to say the words —"once I was a fool about a woman; a second-rate, cowardly adventuress — that's all she was. I asked you to divorce me when the boy was of age, and then I lost out in the firm and she promptly sent me packing. Gad, I went to her expecting sympathy and help, and she turned away as if I were a leper! Well, I don't say but what you've the right to ask for your freedom — do you want it?"

Densie hesitated. She was thinking of the senator's tender, fine face, the gentle voice with its latent power and understanding, the lonely mansion where he never lived because it had no mistress, as he had explained meaningly, the yacht, the motors, the hundred and one fleshpots after which Densie had come to hanker.

"I would rather not say to-night," she answered presently.

"You don't say, though, that you don't want your freedom!"

"No; I could not say I refused your offer. Let us wait a little."

"I'll clear off if you like. It's no pleasure to be the 'old man' in the eyes of the hotel, to sneak to my rooms and eat at side lunch shops rather than in the dining room. Everyone knows I can't pay the bills, that you're the head of the family. I'm an old clerk, way out of step with the times. They pity you — I've heard what they say. The children don't want to go out with me, and Harriet sends me a postal signed by an initial! O my God, I've made a mess of it!"

Without warning he turned and buried his head on the mantel, sobbing hoarsely.

The warm flowing current fairly beat against the ice-coated covering in battle — but the ice coating was the victor.

"I wish you would not speak like that; it is unnecessary. I choose to live in my own way and I am perfectly content to pay for it. I am happy. I have no wish to make you otherwise. As for the children"— she shrugged her shoulders —"they are beyond either of us. If you wish to go away say what you want to do, I will help you. I also wanted to tell you some news if you are in a mood to listen."

He raised his haggard, wistful face.

"You're as human as a marble saint"; then said more to himself: "Little — Densie — Plummer!" He whispered this last but she knew as she winced within of what he was thinking — the days at The Evergreens, the first rosy romance days at the Little House, the night that Harriet, new and very wee, lay in her tired happy arms and John knelt beside her in adoration.

"Sally is to marry Rex Humberstone very soon," she made herself finish without weakening. "She told me to-day." She did not add that Sally had fled from her also. "I shall be glad if it makes her happy. I

thought you ought to know. You might want to talk to her — or to Rex — or something," she concluded vaguely.

"I'm damned sorry," was all he would say, turning back to his pile of rumpled papers and refusing to discuss the subject.

The senator took the news in like fashion. It annoyed Densie that the two men, so unlike, so different in her own estimate of their worth, should agree on such a vital issue. When a woman begins to disapprove her husband, to turn her rejected love into critical blame and gradual disinterest she takes occasion at every opportunity to drive home the truth to her own rather loyal but helpless heart that "here is another proof of his stupidity, his injustice, his idiocy," and so on, and ends a staunch convert to the line of argument that she originally set out to prove.

She was surprised when she went to the senator's office the next morning to learn further details as to pardoning the boys that the senator took the news of the pardoning lightly, but of Sally's intended marriage with seriousness.

"My dear girl," he began, "don't let her marry that old rascal. He is crawling to cover for some reason, for he would never marry anyone unless it was advantageous. Sad as little Sally's love has been it is a far saner sort of 'sad' than if she becomes his wife."

Densie demurred. "I've made myself think it the proper thing," she insisted. "We won't talk it over any more, only — did you ever find out anything about him?"

The senator shook his head. "A downy bird — nearly my age if he is a day! Oh, I'm forgetting — he's only a boy, then, isn't he? And other people I

could mention are only girls!" Densie felt herself flushing as she laughed.

"What's on your calendar?" he asked as she prepared to go. "Tell us what your day with Mrs. Densie Plummer is going to be."

"My days are all so crowded I haven't time to breathe." She was glancing in the mirror at her trim little self in a smart braided serge with a befeathered black hat. "First, I must drop in to order our wedding finery. Then I've a committee meeting at ten-thirty, at half after eleven I'm due at the school board, for we've tiresome detail to get out of the way. There is a suffrage luncheon to-day, and the afternoon is all eaten up by a greedy person known as James Gleason who wants to take me out for a long drive. I must be back by five; the golf tournament finishes at the Park Club, and I'm one of the tea hostesses. The dinner to-night is at the hotel; I'm entertaining federation officers. They won't leave until late, and then, joy of joys, I've about fifty high-school essays to read, being a judge for the Humane Society's Prize Contest! That means midnight — some letters that must get off, and a glance through the New York papers. Heigh-ho, it's a gay life."

And waving a gay good-by she vanished through the doorway.

The senator ran into the corridor — quite after the fashion of Dean and Sally in the old days.

"One moment," he called; "I have an amendment to offer."

"Oh, do!"

Densie was in a reckless mood. In the old days such a reckless mood would have meant that she would coax John not to work in the afternoon, and packing a huge lunch, together with hammocks and endless wraps, the

Plummer family would have adjourned to a near-by fishing grounds. To-day she lingered in the corridor to listen to the senator's amendment.

"When a certain mansion captures its mistress that mistress will not be permitted to peek her nose outside the door for any committees; she is sentenced to the rose garden or to glide about the big rooms dressed in proper pretties ——"

Pretending horrified disapproval Densie fled. But when she was picking out her own and Sally's clothes with a generous hand it occurred to her with a feeling of defeat and disillusionment that men were all alike, after all was said and done! Only one had wooed years ago by means of violets, poems and shy whispers, and another with appointments on committees, honor banquets and national fame simply wrapped up and parcel-posted her. But — after the wooing the same drastic rule for women remained in both their blessed, domineering old hearts! And she was ashamed to say she forgot modern doctrines and felt delightfully comforted and protected.

XXXI

Relenting enough to accept the trousseau and to bring Rex to see her mother, Sally decided on an early marriage date. As they would go to New York for their honeymoon it was not necessary for Harriet to come on. Rex told Densie with a too suave reverence and humble manner that he wanted to take Sally to the Bermudas, but the war made it unsafe — so New York and Washington would complete their modest trip.

With the magic of black imps, so Densie thought, Rex remained the same copper-faced, mocking-eyed person that had looked down scornfully at her years before. He was one of those persons who are born middle aged and stay so. He might grow more withered and copper colored, the mocking eyes a trifle blurred — but to the end he would be the blasé dandy, the man of the world who spoke with a drawl and walked with an air and succeeded in making everyone feel that everything which was useful was not beautiful and anything which was not beautiful was not to be considered the second time.

After a discussion as to the detail — no two women with the prospect of a wedding can possibly refrain from a little heated argument as to where they shall stand and white or black fruit cake — it is to be expected of even a modern police woman or a Hottentot belle — the wedding was solemnized in Densie's salon with only the family and a few friends, the senator among them, present.

It was not a solemn wedding, as weddings should be, but somewhat sinister. It was too perfect — like a stage wedding, with everyone wearing a professional smile and a most gorgeous gown, and the little room overtrimmed with expensive flowers. Sally in her ivory satin with a rare Honiton lace veil and orchids in her happy trembling hands was really the most natural thing connected with it.

Even the minister was entirely too professional as he rushed through the old ring service, being in haste to catch a New York train, where he was to speak for some relief committee. The words sounded disconnected and rather uninteresting to Densie. Densie in apple-green velvet and silver lace looked like Sally's sister. "Younger sister, at that," the senator declared as he deliberately congratulated Densie before he did Sally. John in his new suit, which Densie had sent up without asking permission, seemed out of place, a cat in a strange garret, as he told Densie afterward.

Kenneth was the best man, silent and disapproving, but handsomer than anyone in the world, his mother thought as her eyes kept straying in his direction. Out of courtesy to Kenneth, and because Sally did not care who was asked and who wasn't, she was so happy, Geraldine Poole, Kenneth's object of adoration, was maid of honor.

Geraldine was a tiny, ineffectual person with bright blue eyes set too closely together for character or intelligence and a mass of fluffy yellow hair combed according to the latest dictates. She wore lemon-colored satin with rhinestone trimming and ate a prodigious amount of salad during the breakfast — that was all Densie seemed to make out of her, she confided to the senator.

"Oh, no, there is a great deal more," he promptly

supplemented. "She flirted with Rex right under Sally's nose and called your husband an old dear and managed to get away with the largest piece of cake and to be the center of attention. She is quite a young woman and I think rather mashed on your son. She would like to be known as Densie Plummer's daughter-in-law. Don't worry, the young dog has to have his day. He'll never marry her. She's the sort that uses tears as weapons, and he'll balk at that."

So Densie had tried to make her welcome and forget about her. Rex was the person who radiated the sinister atmosphere; he spoke his responses in quick, sharp fashion, as if eager to have done with it all, and he accepted the good wishes with a bored, patronizing air, calling Sally "Mrs. Humberstone" even to her own mother.

The wedding breakfast was also the sort belonging on the stage of a society drama. After they left in Rex's car Densie philosophically went to work on a Red Cross report, the waiters being the ones to whom fell the task of cleaning away the débris and talking it over. John returned to his linen apron for the afternoon, Kenneth and Geraldine were left to bill and coo among the trampled flowers, and the senator sentimentally to forecast his own and Densie's future.

Thinking it over afterward Densie recalled one incident that had been natural. That was the senator's and John Plummer's greeting and treatment of each other. It was as if two rivals had been forced to leave their weapons outside the castle and sit in helpless agony during some long-drawn-out ceremonial. The only words they had exchanged, accompanying a curt nod, were, "A fine day!"

Harriet wrote that Sally was evidently a happy woman

and she did not feel at ease with Mr. Humberstone, but perhaps he might come to know her better. She had dined with them twice and gone to the theater once and then she left Sally to her husband's friends, of which there seemed a great many. She felt he had the first claim now.

Sally was rather older looking than she ought to be, but it was probably for the best, considering Mr. Humberstone's age, and she, Harriet, had given them a hammered silver tea service. The rest of her letter was devoted to the prospect of her mother's visit to New York during the conference of federated charities, in which both Harriet and Densie, from different angles, were to take important parts.

Preparing for her New York triumphal march, as the senator teased, Densie found her days filled with obligations and engagements; and when a few weeks later Sally and Rex returned and took an apartment at an equally fashionable hotel as Densie's, but some ways distant, Densie said to the senator that she must be getting old; time no longer flew — it fairly cheated her!

Sally came alone to see her mother. Rex was very busy, she explained rather wistfully, and would be over Sunday. "Father will be home then," she added, "and you may have a few moments for us."

"I shall be in New York," Densie said impersonally. "The convention opens Monday. Come here, Sally dear, give me a kiss and tell me how happy you are."

The old warm current would assert itself at times.

Slowly Sally obeyed. "Are you glad I'm married, mummy?"

"Of course, we must all be glad. It is quite your affair. Ken is the only one who has had a distinctly bad effect from it. He has been making himself a slave

to Geraldine. I cannot abide the girl, as shallow as a brook, a pretty, ruffly thing who pretends to adore him. The marriage completely upset any sane ideas Ken had — you know — orange blossoms, harp playing behind potted plants, endless wedding cake and kisses considered good form." Densie laughed.

Sally did not laugh. She sat down at the window seat and pretended to study the landscape. She wore one of her trousseau gowns — black velvet with white satin appliqué and a great drooping hat. Round her shoulders was a shining seal scarf which Rex had bought her in New York, and she had a new platinum wrist watch sparkling with diamonds. The drooping hat kindly hid the expression of her eyes.

"Oh, these weddings!" she murmured wearily. "I hope Ken is sensible and goes to West Point and then loves someone and marries her right away."

"He will." Densie purposely did not notice Sally's weary manner. "Geraldine will never wait four years for anyone — four months is her limit."

"Some women wait," began Sally. Then she gave a little laugh and changed the subject. "Who are the Pooles?"

"I don't know. Nothing very much; they have a flat somewhere. I never called. Her mother plays bridge and her father sings tenor." She shrugged her shoulders.

"Poor Ken is on the rocks if he doesn't watch sharp. I suppose I ought not to keep you from work. You're a mountain of energy, mummy; how do you do it? Remember hundreds of names and thousands of faces and always be well dressed and gracious at all those awful Prison-Gate Mission teas and things — I should think you'd go mad. I have nothing to do but dress

myself and order my meals and Rex wanted me to bring a maid back from New York to do even that. Yet I am perpetually tired — if I have to write a note I have a headache, and if anyone calls on me I want to cry, cry, cry as soon as they are gone! "

Densie looked at her shrewdly. " My aunt showed me how to work," she said; " that is the difference."

" You tried to show me," Sally corrected honestly.

Densie invited her to some meetings for the next day, which she refused listlessly. She started asking about her father, but they became engrossed as to the style of fur boas to be worn next winter so he was forgotten except for Sally's leaving him a little gift.

" Tell me about Harriet," Densie had asked.

" Same old Harriet — thinner, paler, blacker eyes, keener mind and colder heart — more devoted to that idiot Leila, who is deceitful, I'm sure — and more careless of everyone else. She bored Rex, so we saw little of her."

" And Rex? " Densie's voice was very earnest.

Sally's face went white. " He is well," was all she answered, " and very good to me."

But after she had left, fairly dragging her tired, beautiful self down the stairs and into her cab, Densie sat, forgetful of duties and honors and engagements. She was wondering — no bride has that dead look in her eyes without some cause. John had somewhat the same look. Could Densie explain the cause?

XXXII

The war definitely crowded all of Densie's other activities aside. She was officially given the responsibility to organize societies and handle funds, and when she left for the New York convention she took with her a secretary and traveled in a drawing-room, that she might dictate letters on the journey. Once, during a lull, she recalled that other trip to New York, when she had timidly obeyed her husband's dictates and become disillusioned as to Harriet's education, besides being snubbed conscientiously by the entire convention.

This time she had said good-by to John in her matter-of-fact way, not noticing whether or not he responded. The senator was to be in New York also; he had made Densie promise she would step down from her pedestal and play with him some of the time. Harriet also expected to be with her mother; altogether Densie's days would be crowded to overflowing, and she decided she would not wire Kenneth to join her as she had halfway promised. Some other time she would give up a week and take Kenneth to New York, at which time she would not speak before a single club or meet anyone who would ask her to sign a petition or use her influence with such and such a personage.

One other time during the journey she recalled her family. A bride had entered the car at some small station, rice and roses dripping from her in profusion and a nice-faced young husband solicitously trying to carry all the bags and the bride as well. Something about the

bridegroom reminded her of Dean Laddbarry. Woman fashion she could not resist taking a look at the bride, a pretty country girl, ill at ease in her new gown, but as Densie passed down the aisle she smiled at her, a clear lovely smile of pure happiness. Densie felt a pang of mother envy that this girl's eyes were such joyous things to look upon while Sally's had been tired and haggard and her smile nothing but a clumsy mask for overwrought nerves and bewildered heart.

Densie would have been surprised had she known what was happening at Sally's apartment at this identical moment. Dressed for a country-club tea, at which Rex had ordered her to appear, Sally had been putting on her gloves when a bell boy brought up a card. For a moment she read it without allowing herself to believe the name she saw engraved: Dean Laddbarry.

She read it again, wondering if the boy saw how she trembled; then she said she would see him. Dropping her gloves on the table she stood with her hands outstretched waiting for the door to open.

A tall lantern-jawed man came into the fussy little room and seemed to overcrowd it just by his presence. If Sally Plummer had changed, so had Dean Laddbarry. The boy was gone; he was a strong, sober man, the honest eyes were keen and piercing, and his body had developed from muscular work until he seemed a stranger giant rather than the former slender Dean. He wore the unconventional dress of a man who is making good and has no time to bother with flubdubs. His boots were not highly polished and the suit was of gray and speckled red, undeniably store bought, while his tie was a bit rumpled and its style and color nondescript.

He looked at Sally without speaking. As Sally was thinking of the change she saw in her old boy friend so

Dean was thinking that he had left Sally Plummer a beautiful frivolous girl and he found her a tired yet beautiful woman. Her gown of pink satin with bands of black fox and the French hat of jet emphasized the impression. It seemed as if she were "too tired way inside" to bother wearing such gowns and hats and doing them justice, as if she would rather be in some simple white thing, free to wander off to a garden nook and sit watching growing, quiet things, and rest. He noted the rings, the bracelet watch, the collar of pearls, the corsage of orchids.

Then he said slowly: "Well, Sally, has it made you happy?"

She did not answer. It seemed as if she were momentarily hypnotized and could not stop staring at this rugged out-of-door man who had looked deep into her heart and read its secret.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked presently.

He straddled a frivolous gold chair, leaning his arm across the back of it and watching her carefully. "I came East on business; I'm only here two days. I went to your father's store." He paused to think of the great change he had found in The Golden Rule Tea Store with the beaproned clerk. "He said you were married to Rex. I would not have hunted you up only your mother was out of town and Ken not to be found. I couldn't go away without seeing some of you, so here I am; and how are my chances for a real welcome?"

"I see," Sally answered dully. "You look well—and happy," she added timidly.

Dean's eyes kept staring at her without mercy. "What a ghastly change!" he murmured.

"Stop!" She tilted her head in characteristic defiance. "What right have you to come and tell me

ıny such thing? If — my — my husband ——" She ried to say the words with joyous assurance of her hus- ıand, but it was a miserable failure. Her head drooped.

" I have the right of someone who has loved you a good many years; and that's a right no one can take ıway from me. How you have changed; you seem to me just to be making yourself keep up the game. It isn't the real you, Sally. Pal, don't you remember how you used to tell me everything good or bad — can't you tell me again? Can't you trust me? Tell me what is bothering. I'll be three thousand miles away from you within a few days — I'll never come back, it is likely. Sometimes it's a relief to talk; want to? "

Her lips quivered. " Don't make me hate myself any more," she begged. " There is nothing to tell — noth- ing that is anyone's concern but mine. Please let us talk about the West and your work, anything but my own wretched self. Oh, I cannot bear it! " She struck the palms of her hands together sharply.

" Have you told your mother? " he insisted.

Sally smiled. " You have not seen mummy, so you can't understand. Only standing committees tell mummy things; or the senator, or the President, or — I can't make you realize how changed it all is. Mummy lives for herself, Dean, not for her family. She isn't a woman's woman any more."

" So I surmised. And the home? "

" We have no home. We lived at the hotel until I married and came here. Rex hates a home. I would not know how to manage one if I had it. A home is quite impossible for any of us." And she laughed so shrilly that Dean's nerves began to assert themselves.

" What made him finally marry you? " he asked bru- tally.

Sally started to her feet. "I will not listen to you — an intruding stranger!"

Dean rose and grasped her hands in his strong kindly ones. "I always loved you, Sally Plummer, and I always will. I'd fight your husband for you now if he would fight — but he's a coward. I've had to stand by and see you pass me up and let yourself be a slave to that cad. I had to go away with no promise of you, no incentive to make me make good — and yet I made good anyway, because I stole you in my thoughts and had you for my incentive. Yes, I did — just that. I couldn't have stood it if I hadn't let myself pretend that you cared, that some day I could come back and listen to you say 'Yes.' It wasn't such a bad thing to do, was it, Sally darling? Look at me — not away from me. There, don't cry. Sally, it could be worse. If you had forgotten how to cry — that would be a degree more hopeless. Let me hold your hands another minute while I finish. Shall we sit here together?"

Like a child she let him lead her to a little tête-à-tête, her hands clinging to his.

"I wanted to come back, Sally, and see if you would still say 'No.' I hadn't heard of the marriage, for I'm rather out of the way of civilization and your mother doesn't write me any more. I came here hoping dreams might come true. I found out the worst before I'd been in town an hour. I who really know you both, ask you to tell me why you married him — you wretched, lovely woman."

The grip on her hands tightened.

"If I could tell anyone, Dean, it would be you," she answered. "I married him because all my starved woman's heart wanted the revenge, the satisfaction of marrying him after the wasted years — and I loved him.

Not as I once loved him, but with the same infatuated blindness by which he won me. I was happy to marry him. But I thought of you, Dean, many times. Odd, wasn't it? And so — and now — oh, I cannot go on!" Such a look of terror came into her face that Dean dropped her hands as he bent closer to peer into her eyes.

"Tell me, Sally. I'll do anything you say. I'll forget the word discretion; or remember it — just as you like. Tell me — shall I carry you off like a bandit — will you come — tell me? I'll fight him like a man — I'll ——" He had forgotten himself, for he was holding her in his strong tender arms.

She let her cheek rest on his shoulder while she sobbed, "Dean — oh, mummy!" — in some unexplained anguish of the soul. "Let me alone; it is too late — too late; but I did not know. I did not dream."

Then she broke away from him and walked to the window, trying to compose herself. Dean stood back, abashed, remembering that after all Sally was another man's wife. After years of loyal and unreturned love, tempered only by his stolen dreams, the truth had crashed in relentlessly and for all time. Whatever the secret it was Sally's — Sally Humberstone's, to be exact.

"I'm sorry I've stirred all this up," he said gently. "I didn't mean to when I came in. Only I've loved you so hard, Sally, I always hoped you'd care some day."

"I know." Sally was her old tired but poised self. "I understand." She turned and faced him. "But we must not forget that it is too late." A tender expression crossed her face. "Have you never met anyone you could love?"

"No one, Sally — for you see I loved you in dreams." He picked up his hat and fumbled with it boyishly.

"You'd make some woman so happy," she added wistfully. "You must try to love someone and forget me. I've been my own worst enemy, Dean, as well as disappointing you."

"I'm afraid it will always be Sally. But that's neither here nor there." He straightened up with an effort. "I'm sorry to have made a scene. Remember me to Ken, won't you? Your father is changed — he's an old man, and yet he really isn't old, is he? Tell your mother I still remember her cake and pie."

Sally shook her head. "If you do, mummy doesn't. We're all changed now, Dean. Only you seem to be the same. Now tell me about your work."

Dean outlined his enterprises. There was such a vigor, such a clean-cut honest way about him and about his plans that Sally listened with eager admiration. Finally he glanced at the ornate room with its smart furnishings and artificial setting, a painted parrot on a white-and-red stand being the only attempt at a companion.

"So this is Sally Plummer's home," he said soberly. "Oh, I can't remember you here — but as you were back at the Little House where we had such good times. Good-by, dear. Promise that if you ever want or need me you will send." He laid an address on the table.

"Good-by, Dean. Good luck — and may love come to you," she answered unsteadily, holding out her hand.

He took it with a disinterested gesture, and then without warning drew her to him and kissed her fiercely, whispering, "I'm not stealing this — it is my right to kiss you once. I've kissed you so many times in dreams. Tell him if you wish. I'd like the whole world to know."

Before she could answer he had left the room and

Sally was alone — the painted parrot looking over with a mocking jeer. She took off her hat and went into her bedroom. It was impossible to go to the club tea, even though it would anger Rex. There are limits to endurance. She picked up Dean's card and address and put them carefully away. Then she tried to read some frivolous story, tossing it aside in despair. She went to her desk to answer notes, but she misspelled words and blotted the paper. She began walking up and down the room, the parrot jeering at her every time she made a turn.

Finally Rex came in. His copper-colored face was a trifle flushed and his eyes had a look of keen displeasure.

"I waited an hour for you," he began without any other greeting. "Eunice Hunt took your place at the tea table. Why didn't you have the grace to let people know if you were not going to honor them with your presence?"

"I meant to come," she said dully. "I am dressed for the thing, as you can see. I had a headache. I did not think it necessary to telephone."

"I explained to you why it was necessary." He hissed the words a trifle; Sally had learned this was a forerunner of rage. He threw down his coat and hat and came toward her, pointing his finger at her with meaning. "See here, young woman, the next time I arrange to meet you any place and you don't want to come because you're in one of your moods or sulks — you come or you let me know! I'm not to be made a fool of — not at this stage of the game."

"Are we always to go on like this?" asked Sally wearily. "You are no more like the man I first loved than I am like the child I once was. I'm tired of it; it is

like painted films, flat, monotonous. I almost get to hate myself," she was about to finish the sentence, but she controlled herself.

"It makes no difference what you think — just now," he reminded in a peculiarly soft voice. "There is every reason in the world to make us work together." He hissed the words more loudly. "See here!"

He drew something from his pocket and made her read it.

She gave a cry of protest. "Stop it — stop it — before it is too late! No, I'll have none of it ——"

His thin cruel hand took her wrist, the nails deliberately cutting into her flesh.

"If you turn on me," he said with deliberation, the whites of his eyes emphasizing their maliciousness, "I will kill you." Then he dropped her wrist and gave a little laugh as he pushed her away. "Come, let us be normal, my dear," he finished sardonically. "I'm sure you'd rather have a box coat of sables than a bullet — eh?"

Sally fled from the room, locking her bedroom door and refusing to answer. All through the night she sobbed in helpless surrender — and thought of Dean Laddbarry's kiss!

XXXIII

Densie's New York trip was a distinct success. She rode in a motor with prominent statesmen in the patriotic parade and was given every possible attention, her picture was printed in all the papers with complimentary headings.

Harriet marveled at her mother's success, at her way of dressing, the girlish fashion in which she received her attentions and compliments. Densie found a greater change in her daughter than she had fancied could occur. She had rather settled in her own mind that Harriet was always to stay dark haired and pale, clever and satisfied with impersonal views of life and impersonal work.

But she noted a strange restlessness beneath the veneer of content, a nervous irritability when work pressed too hard. When she ventured to ask the reason for this Harriet answered almost rudely that it was nothing, and never to bother her with such questions again. But after four very busy days — with the senator coaxing her to play and herself trying to attend to her duties and not succumb to temptation — Densie understood the reason for Harriet's new manner.

She was to take dinner with the girls, as she called Leila and Harriet, and then go on to her evening affairs. It was to be the one informal dinner she had found time to have — even the senator was banished to drives and brief cups of afternoon tea.

Coming up the apartment-house stairs Densie began to reorder her mind. She found it necessary to have several mental compartments into which certain sets of

persons and circumstances were placed and definitely made to remain. It was the only way in which she could successfully carry on her various lines of work — and her family. The family mental compartment corresponded to that one corner of the old-style attic that was house-cleaned once a year and called "where all the things we don't use are kept."

So Densie began to think of Harriet's nervous manner, the almost bitter way in which she spoke of even trivial affairs. She rang several times before Harriet in an unheard-of frousled state answered, her face so white that Densie wondered if Harriet might not have weathered through some hard illness without writing home.

"My child" — she put her hand on her shoulder — "what in the world is wrong with you? I shan't stay for dinner — you must go to bed."

Harriet jerked away. Now it would be hard for a manikin to come to life suddenly and show emotion naturally, as flesh-and-blood persons have long been accustomed to do. The manikin would have to strut about, bend awkwardly, speak absurdly and have peculiar expressions. So it was with Harriet. From the long period of repression and impersonal living it was not possible for her to express any real sorrow in natural fashion.

"Come in, please," she said sharply; "I've something to say."

Wondering, Densie followed her down the hall and into the living room. "What in the world is it, Harriet? I don't like the way you look and act."

Harriet gave a shrill laugh. "Don't you? Neither do I." Her thin pale fingers began smoothing her hair. "I'm sorry not to be dressed — rather upset." She

spoke the words begrudgingly, as if she hated herself for showing how she felt and hated her mother for being present to see it. "Leila married — she eloped with some silly idiot of a student — ten years younger than herself — never liked him — told her so — tried to break it up — she lied to me — said she never would marry." Her fingers kept twisting and untwisting a loose strand of hair. "Said she was wedded to work — never hinted of what she was going to do — worried me a long time — ran off like a servant girl — noon to-day. Oh!"

She gave a strangled cry of grief and left the room.

Densie followed. "There is nothing to go to pieces about," she said sensibly. "If Leila wished to marry someone it is her affair. There are plenty of other girls to room with or keep house — I'd be glad for her if she was glad."

Harriet turned to glare at her mother. "Knew you'd not understand," she said sharply. "Wouldn't you feel the least bit knocked — if she had been your chum all along? She ——" Then she stopped and refrained from the rest of the truth, being too much of a thoroughbred. For Leila had steadily and deliberately borrowed Harriet's money with no intention of repaying, and she had eloped not only with a boy student but with the greater share of Harriet's earnings.

"Now, Harriet, please wash your face and comb your hair and get some tea." Densie was annoyed this should have happened when she was so busy and needed all her strength. "I'm sure I cannot see what a terrible tragedy it is. You have lived so long alone that you are not used to having anyone do anything except just as you say ——"

Harriet interrupted her mother with an ugly little

laugh, merely indicative of her nerves, but to Densie it seemed insolence.

"I want you to let me alone!" she declared, beside herself with anger and grief. "I'll live by myself and never have another friend — don't worry! I'm through trusting people. I'm no child to be ordered about — I'm tired."

And on the verge of hysterics she left her mother standing in the bedroom doorway while she vanished into her little dressing room.

"You need a vacation and new clothes," Densie insisted. "When America enters the war, Harriet, you are certain to go to France, and you must be fit."

Harriet began whistling loudly, her manikin fashion of showing emotion. She did not know how really to cry.

"I wish you'd stop whistling while I am trying to talk." Densie's temper asserted itself. "You ought to live in a hotel like any sensible woman — and for goodness sakes, send Leila word that you congratulate her! How very silly you are about some things!"

"Only kept the place up for Leila — she didn't have money enough for a hotel." Harriet reappeared in the doorway. "I'll never keep house again — or try to save a cent — never! Please go, mummy; I can't talk to anyone who doesn't understand."

Densie gave a sigh of relief at her dismisssal. "I'm sure you are as great a problem as your sister once was. I've only Kenneth to rely on." And turning, she deserted the apartment and its forlorn mistress with alacrity.

If she could have seen Kenneth at that moment she might not have felt she could rely on him to the extent she had permitted herself to believe. He was to take dinner with the Poole family. He was so busy turning

the pages of Geraldine's asinine father's asinine tenor solos, pretending to be in ecstasy at the reedy voice informing one that the birds would come north again, that Densie would scarcely have known him for her sensible son. He had bought Mrs. Poole and Gerry handsome corsages and was going to take them all to the theater the following night.

Gerry and her mother evidently satisfied with the way things were turning out waited impatiently until Pater Poole delivered himself of the last tip-top note.

Then Mrs. Poole said complacently, "Kenneth dear, I'm afraid we must talk very plainly to you about our little girl."

At which Mr. Poole whirled round on the piano stool and pretended to be startled, while Gerry, a swirl of white lace and ribbons, blushed and said: "Oh, mamma, don't scold Ken. He wanted to tell you. We — we're engaged!" And then she ran to her father to hide her head on his shoulder.

Trembling with terror lest the verdict be unfavorable, Kenneth tried to say all in a moment, that he had brilliant prospects and he certainly loved Gerry as no one had ever loved before and always would and he was not one-tenth good enough for her and he hoped they would not think him too young and if they would only let him try to prove worthy he would be too happy for words — or dinner!

"Our little girl is very young herself," began Mrs. Poole in proper fashion, concealing her inward delight; "yet she seems to care very deeply — I have always dreaded the day when she would choose a stranger before her papa and mamma."

Kenneth gave way to another profusion of promises.

"I shall not stop true love — no matter how this old

heart of mine bleeds, Kenneth," Mrs. Poole asserted nobly. "Harold, what have you to say?"

Mr. Poole turned to the piano after disengaging Geraldine and played a bar of How Can I Leave Thee — Geraldine looking coyly at Kenneth and smiling her encouragement. Then her father added with characteristic dramatic pathos, having once been a trouper, "I've nothing against you, my boy — only that you have taken our prize. Cherish her tenderly. Ah, me, the nest is empty."

Geraldine sidled across the room to put her hand in Kenneth's while they received a prolonged and admonitory blessing. Later in the evening the Pooles left the young things alone while they departed to tell their best friends that Gerry was engaged to Kenneth Plummer and wasn't she lucky? Everyone knew that Mrs. Densie Plummer had more prestige than the mayor's wife!

In unrestrained rapture Kenneth signed his very soul away in answer to Geraldine's demands that she never keep house but live like his mother, have lovely clothes to wear, and that if America went to war he would try to get something to do in the censor's office, that he would always love her and tell her so once a day, and he would raise a mustache and begin to wear cloth-top shoes.

Densie left New York a few days later than she had planned, due to extra work. She had lost time trying to deal with Harriet, only finding herself set aside as completely as when years ago she had tried to convince Harriet of the folly of leading her own life.

Harriet refused any sympathy and was irritated by the mere mention of Leila's name. She began to dismantle the apartment and planned to move to a good and expensive hotel. It did not matter, Harriet argued, whether or not she lived up to her income or a tiny ways

beyond it — what was the use in ever saving? She also, to Densie's disappointment, refused to have the senator help her to a better position — that was Harriet's form of a horsehair shirt — and she told her mother good-by in very formal fashion, talking glibly of the book she was to write on The History of Philanthropy.

Densie looked forward to seeing her boy; she could make herself numb regarding Sally's listless self, John's sullen person with his inevitable query, "I suppose you've had a good time — you look it." But her boy — he could never fail her.

Even the senator was jealous of Kenneth he had declared. "Wait until some girl makes Kenneth part his hair in the middle and dress like an actor," he had warned; "then you'll be glad enough to have me about."

Blushing, Densie had denied the prophecy, but the senator had persisted.

"I can tell by your eyes when that has happened," he said; "and then I shall make the most important speech of my whole life."

In her heart Densie knew she would be glad to listen. She wondered, just at the time the senator was telling her this, and much against her inclination to wonder, as to what John had been doing during her absence. Her mental compartments did not always work according to her desire!

XXXIV

Kenneth met his mother at the train; he could scarcely wait until the greetings were over and they were in a whirling taxi to confide: "Mummy, Gerry Poole has promised to marry me and I'm the happiest chap alive!"

Densie looked at him in humorous dismay. The news did not impress her as serious.

"My dear boy, when your mother was gone did you have to get into mischief? You babes in the woods." She put her hand on his affectionately.

"I've spoken to her father and mother," Kenneth insisted, "and they are willing to give Gerry to me. It rather knocks the West Point plan, because four-year engagements are not the thing. I knew you'd understand. Gerry wants to be married soon. You tell the senator. I'm going into business as soon as I find an opening." He did not add the rest of the truth — that Geraldine dreaded America's advent into the war and Kenneth's possible enlistment.

Densie frowned. "I don't want to be the proverbial ogre in fairy tales, but I cannot approve this. All very well for you to be engaged — but I want my boy to go to West Point as we planned. It is a greater opportunity than to marry Geraldine Poole," she said rather hastily.

At this Kenneth took exception. "I'm afraid you think of love last, mummy. You forget I love Geraldine and she loves me. We are not going to let any stupid career break through to spoil happiness. I can be just as much use in the world in business as in the Army."

"But when we enter this war?" Densie suggested gravely.

"Then I'll talk to Gerry and make her see that I must go. Of course, I'd go!" he added almost angrily. "You didn't think I'd try to hide behind your and Gerry's skirts, did you?"

"No, Kenneth." She patted his hand gently. "I know you would never shrink from duty. Only it hurts to see the West Point commission so lightly given up. Think well before you do so. Such chances come but seldom."

"Does a great love come but once?" He was so serious and so boyish with the threadbare little mustache and pink-and-white complexion that Densie longed to draw him over to her and kiss him regardless of his twenty-one years and the newly found love of a lifetime!

"Darling, you are so young," she murmured evasively. "I cannot take it quite seriously. Do look about a bit — both you and Gerry."

"Well, were you any older?" he retorted.

Then he paused for they had just passed the Golden Rule store and the driver had not been given notice to stop.

"We'll talk about it later. Bring Gerry to me this afternoon. She's a pretty little thing, but has she any brains?"

Densie took the affair as a joke. She could not convince herself otherwise. She did not intend Kenneth should marry Geraldine Poole, but she was wise enough not to forbid his engagement; there were far better, more gradual methods, she fancied.

"Oh, she's a wonderful mind!" Kenneth championed. "She can — why, she can — well, she's the dearest girl in town," he ended in self-defense.

They had reached the hotel and he helped his mother out and carried in her bags. When they were in their rooms Kenneth lingered about.

"Was there anything else, dear?" Densie was looking at her accumulation of mail.

"Did you have a perfect blaze of glory? I read the accounts."

"Rather! Everything successful save Harriet. She's a nervous wreck, but she's moved to a hotel and I think it will work out splendidly. Harriet never should have kept house. Have you seen Sally?"

"I took dinner with them last night," he grumbled. "I can't go Rex. Awful pill! Beastly to Sally — that quiet cold sarcasm handed to you on a silver platter."

Densie dropped her letters. "You don't think she is happy?"

Kenneth looked very grave, as a newly engaged young man should look when questioned on matters of the heart.

"I'm afraid not; she bucks up pretty well. Now I wouldn't want Gerry to suspect they were unhappy because she — er —well — she might think it sort of runs in the family, you know"— he avoided Densie's eyes — "and she would not marry me."

Densie coughed discreetly.

Then Kenneth added, "I'm off to the office now, mummy, and it's jolly you're back. I missed you worlds; and don't worry about my not doing my bit over there when the time comes. You know my old dream of being a captain!"

Densie smiled. "My boy, after all." She blew him a kiss. "Bring Gerry for tea — good luck, dear."

At the four o'clock tea with her future daughter-in-law Densie felt she was wasting a precious hour with this

izzled haired girl in her saintly frock lavishly embroid-ed with gold. Kenneth was the only happy person of ıe trio; with blind masculine conceit he now felt his omen were united, and he looked first at Gerry with lindly adoring eyes and then with proud admiration at is mother, and then fell to demolishing the sandwiches ith a perfectly normal appetite.

Geraldine regarded Densie as her natural foe, though ıe simpered pretty nothings and agreed to everything. he was afraid of Mrs. Densie Plummer just as she ıther envied Mrs. Rex Humberstone and had a con-mpt for Mr. John Plummer. There was something out Densie that inspired her awe — her dignity, her wns, her clever fashion of finding out what one really ought no matter what one said. As for Densie, she garded Geraldine as an overdressed, wild little Ameri-n and regretted that calf love was necessary in this y and age. How much better if Kenneth could have llen prey to some other person — any other person, in ct, than this affected creature with no ability for real ıotion. However, with the approaching war and Ken-th's absence it would all blow over, for he would re-rn to find Geraldine some other man's prize, and in uthful disillusionment he would seek out his mother ıd be set right again. As Densie planned it it promised ell!

Geraldine told Kenneth that she was afraid of his other, she was such a stupid little thing, and his mother d not want him to marry her — making great tearful es all the while. They were in Geraldine's home and ıe felt more at ease than in Densie's little salon.

"She's so clever — and I'm not; and neither is my amma. But then, my mamma loves my papa," she ıded with an ugly little laugh.

At which Kenneth took on his own shoulders the entire blame for it all and said that Densie loved Geraldine and he worshiped her, nothing short of that, and that he loved her father and mother, and his own father and mother were happy — oh, quite happy, only in a different sort of way — he could not just explain it.

Appeased somewhat Geraldine secured the promise of a silver chain purse like Sally's and then she added coyly, "You won't enlist when we go to war, will you, Kenneth? Wait until they make you go. You know I'm almost your wife, and that makes a difference."

"You'd want me to go, wouldn't you?" he begged. "You'd wait for me if I was over in France fighting?"

Geraldine burst into tears. "I'd lose my mind, I'd worry so! I'd be afraid you'd lose an arm or leg. I'd die if you came back with one arm! Don't leave me, Ken! Why, you'd get no pay at all if you went and enlisted!"

"But it's duty," he corrected with a graveness worthy of older years; "and even you, Gerry, could not make me forget that."

Something in his manner warned her she had trespassed a bit too far. She had only entered the first romance zone, and her claims on the lad were fragile and easily shattered. It would be time enough when war was a reality. Maybe the old war would be over by Valentine's Day! It did seem as if one poor little girl who had never harmed anyone might claim the diamond ring which was promised her for a valentine! Even if the whole affair with Densie Plummer's son came to naught else — that ring would have made it worth while.

Densie did not go out in the evening, so she met her husband as he came into their rooms. He had a way of walking in swiftly as if he would prefer not to be seen.

There was an eternal shame in his mind in being known as Mrs. Densie Plummer's husband and having to take his wife's checks down to the desk in payment. He longed to change to some obscure room such as Sam Hippler and Maude Hatton had once had, and there be free to lead his own life in his own way.

"Oh," he said in customary fashion, "did you have a good time?"

"Yes, did you get the newspapers?"

Densie made no pretense of kissing him. She was contrasting him with the senator as she looked at him.

"The boy got them, I saw him reading. I didn't bother. I dare say I wouldn't have understood what it was all about. Were you going down to dinner?"

"I thought we might have it up here for a change; I'm rather fagged."

"Surely not *en famille?*" he said, smiling. "What an event!"

Densie telephoned her order without comment. "I am sorry we cannot eat together more often." She pushed out a card table to act as the festive board. "But we never seem to be interested in the same things. Harriet is very run down; she is moving to a hotel. This Leila married suddenly, and it completely upset her. Harriet ought never to have any bosom friend, she ought to give her whole self to her work."

"Human beings are a nuisance, aren't they — when one wants a career?"

John was standing with his back to her, watching the gas logs burn dismally.

"Oh, not that — only certain persons are meant for certain things and others change after a time and the old régime does not appeal to them." Densie felt confused annoyance. She wished she had not suggested the

little dinner. "Has Ken told you his great secret?" She was anxious to change the subject.

"I've guessed it," John said quietly. "No one ever tells me anything. We've changed places, you and I, Densie. I understand how you felt."

Densie was silent.

"It is Geraldine Poole, isn't it — that flaxen haired sylph? I've seen the handwriting on the wall for some time. Are they engaged?"

"So Ken says — she is a brainless atom and it will never last. This war will make a man of him."

"Oh, is there going to be a war?"

"Certainly — and our boy must go."

John drummed on the chair arm. "She won't want him to." This by way of making a remark.

"That is where the breach will come. I'm not worrying. I know him too well. It is a trifle annoying, that's all. Young marriages are mistakes."

And she watched John open the door to the waiter and help him place the dishes on the table.

When they were alone she asked, "What do you hear from Sally and Rex? They have quite a self-centered life, never taking part in anything save senseless society nonsense. And do you know how Rex gets his money? Their hotel is twice as expensive as ours — and they've a beautiful new car."

John leaned back in his chair, memories of the fifteen per week and the white linen apron making his voice a bit caustic. "I'm too busy getting rich myself to bother about the other fellow," was all he would say.

Having exhausted their family as a topic there came a great lull. Densie was planning to-morrow's schedule, wedging in a visit to Sally and one to the exchange out of courtesy, and John was lost in his own thoughts.

After dinner she excused herself and said she would finish her letters, she knew he wished to read.

"Oh, certainly," John answered formally; "I do." And there was an unusual emphasis on the last two words.

Returning to the salon for an address book Densie saw that he was lost in the study of some red-cloth book. She wondered what it was since he did not even glance up as she passed through the room. The next morning she deliberately hunted for it. After a search through his meager possessions she came upon it, massed about by a lot of magazines. The book was Practical Farming for Beginners, and the magazines were all farm and poultry journals.

XXXV

Densie Plummer found her daughter having an inexcusably late breakfast in her room. She was pretending to eat, merely wasting her food and glancing at the morning paper propped beside her.

"Good morning, mother dear," Sally said easily as Densie entered, "I was going to phone yesterday, for I supposed you were back from New York. But I had a wretched headache and didn't feel able. Better, thank you; just that lazy feeling that seems to have become attached to me. Have some coffee? Then sit over there and let me gaze upon my famous mummy."

Sally was gentle in her manner; the former spirit and impulsiveness had vanished. She was like an old woman in a young, weary body. Unconsciously Densie shook her head as she looked at her. The red-gold hair was carelessly combed and the cheeks pale and sunken, without their customary rouge. Her morning gown of flame-colored silk accentuated the pallor. Her dead eyes seemed not to look at her mother, but above, beyond, away — it was hard to describe their evasive method of glancing round one.

"What is the matter, Sally dear? Have the burdens of the world fallen upon you?"

"Don't pry, mummy. It is nothing — just awful ennui of the soul, I guess. I want to go away if Rex will let me. I want the sea — did you ever feel that you must go away, miles and miles away, where no one knows you and where you can sit on the beach and listen to the

boom-boom of the sea and forget everything that is happening in the world of men?"

"Where could you go in midwinter?"

"Florida, California — Bermuda — anywhere — I don't care. I'm stifled in this place with its glaring gilt decorations. I hate the gossiping hotel people, I can't gamble well enough to be engrossed in cards, cigarettes hurt my throat and cocktails give me these heads. I don't even care enough to get up an affair with someone. I'm just a foolish sort of person, one who cried for what she should not have all her young best days — and when she finally got it — didn't want it!"

"Why not take an interest in something worth while? Come down to the Red Cross every morning, I need another clerical worker. Do sewing for the Belgian children. There's the Armenian and Syrian relief that fairly haunts me — make a life for yourself outside of everyone else and independent of them."

Sally shook her head. "I am only a slug."

"Why are you?" demanded her mother.

Sally shrugged her shoulders; her face had a grayish look that was alarming.

"Won't — Rex let you?" The old warm current stirred beneath the coating of ice.

"Don't talk about it, mummy. Tell me of New York and your success."

"Tell me about your husband, this man you so blindly adored, who seemed to mean life to you if he married you and death if he did not. Why is it all so hard, my dear? Tell mummy."

Densie leaned forward sympathetically, but she did not hold out her hands.

"I cannot," was all Sally answered. "If you love me, mummy, never ask me again."

At which interesting juncture Rex made his appearance, spick-and-span as a bridegroom, his wizened, copper-colored face newly shaven and powdered, the mocking eyes encased in their too vast whites a trifle bloodshot.

"My dear Mother Plummer," he said suavely, going over to her with utmost deference, "and how are we with all our honors and patriotic enterprises? What a little woman it is — eh, Sally?" He looked at the girl sharply.

"So I've been saying." She spoke with almost nervous fear.

"Well, we have to have someone in the family with brains," he added with the suggestion of a sneer. "I suppose New York is all agog with war agitation — the news is ominous, isn't it?" He picked up Sally's newspaper and pretended to study it. "Afraid we'll have to jump in and whip 'em a-plenty!" he added forcibly. "I hope you'll use your influence all you can, Mother Plummer."

"I am working night and day for it — we must do our part. Surely the nation will see its duty in time to help."

"I am positive of it — pray God," he said earnestly.

Sally let a cup crash on to the floor. "So sorry," she said, her lips quivering.

"Don't mention it," Rex answered, as one speaks with veiled warning to a child before company.

Though Densie approved Rex's attitude she wondered all that day as to the meaning of the little happening.

XXXVI

Valentine's Day brought Geraldine the coveted ring! "I'm so happy, Ken dear, that I'm afraid I shall die before I've the chance to wear it!" she said honestly. "Isn't it a beauty? And a carat and a half. Your sister's is two carats, isn't it? And your mother has several."

"It isn't half good enough for you," he assured her, "but it means I love you and you are to be my wife." All the trust of youth was in his dark eyes as he spoke. "When we are married you shall have all the rings I can buy if you still want them."

Geraldine showed the ring to Densie and Sally with coy shyness. Both praised it and kissed her in preoccupied, rather indifferent fashion, while John Plummer looked at her a long time without speaking, causing her to blush and vow an everlasting hatred for the old grocery clerk.

Her mother and father called Kenneth "our boy," and after the advent of the ring they explained how necessary it was for Geraldine's happiness that they all live together. To which plan he assented, smothering a trifle of disappointment.

"The war clouds are ominous," Mrs. Poole had expounded, "and if you must go, Ken, our little girl had better stay with us."

The day after Valentine's Day Densie had the greatest honor of all conferred upon her. The President wished to see her; he wished her coöperation in a campaign for

war relief. It was not generally announced that Mrs. Densie Plummer was to confer with the Chief Executive at Washington and his assistants, but everyone became aware of the matter whom Densie wished to become aware of it, and when asked by the newspapers as to the truth of the report she said that she neither affirmed nor denied it. The society column of the same issue had the leading notice to the effect that Mrs. Densie Plummer had left for Washington.

But a still greater joy came to her, though she tried not to admit it — even greater than that never-to-be-forgotten morning conference spent in the White House hearing naught but praises and being asked for suggestions. Densie thought as she stood on the steps of the White House after the session was ended that she must have reached the zenith of her career. She recalled briefly, as drowning men review their lives in swift, furious panorama, the various ways in which she had ascended the ladder.

But the greater, more personal joy and satisfaction came when Senator Gleason kidnapped her, as he explained to her secretary, and made her go with him into Virginia to his winter home, the home that had been for many years without a proper mistress.

"I must catch the night train," Densie said in confusion.

"You may — but first you shall give me the afternoon!"

So they drove through the country roads to the estate — Glen Laurie — where the old servants welcomed their master with enthusiasm, and one, older than the others, added feebly, "Mass'r and Missis," pretending ignorance as to the falseness of the statement.

The house was a rambling white affair with well-

planned grounds and diamond-paned windows, jutting balconies at unexpected places, servants' quarters, stables, gardens — everything which went to comprise a Southern estate. With an old mammy as guide the senator and Densie went through the partially dismantled rooms. He showed her the portrait of his wife over the fireplace in the entrance hall — a gentle-faced girl with glowing, happy eyes. Something in the expression recalled Sally as she had been at twenty.

When they finished the tour of inspection, Densie having been for the most part silent, the senator made her linger in the hallway while he said: " I've waited as long as I intend to wait, Densie. The boy has given his heart away, and you're lonesome. I'm lonesome. I want a home. I cannot have a home alone — I want you. Don't you think I've been patient long enough? "

Densie did not answer at first. She looked up at the portrait of the young wife. The senator thought she was thinking of his first and deeper love and strove to argue with her that this was not so. But it was not the case, for the portrait had blurred into many and composite portraits — Aunt Sally and Uncle Herbert, Densie herself as a child, sitting in the walnut rocker to do her spool crochet and learning that she was to have a brother; John astride his pony in the kitchen garden, the Little House as they had come to it after their wedding journey, the first day Harriet walked and John and Densie celebrated it as a general does a victory, Kenneth as a baby, Sally as a girl, Densie in her old-style clothes, her martyred outlook upon life; and finally, after this bewildering sort of experience, the portrait persisted in becoming that of a tired man with kindly eyes and grizzled hair — with a linen apron tied about him and toil-worn, degraded hands.

Then she said, "I cannot. I am an old woman and I cannot play as you would have me."

"You are not old; you are young. I am not old, nor shall we let ourselves grow old in spirit. Look at me, Densie — say you don't care. Ah, you cannot, can you?"

"We could never find happiness by riding roughshod over someone else's unhappiness."

"Who would be unhappy? Who cares? Who has cared? Tell me."

Despite her logical self trying to dominate and accept this crowning glory, Densie found that blurred psychic portrait of the tired man would not vanish.

"Oh, not now, my dear," she begged; "not now, anyway."

"But you do care?" he urged.

"I care," she admitted slowly. "I wish I were free to say 'yes.'"

"Then you shall be free — that is enough of an answer."

Stooping swiftly he kissed her.

All the way home Densie kept thinking of the portrait of the girl bride which seemed so lonely and deserted, and of the psychic blur which made the tired-faced man come into the frame, and of the boyish, gentle little senator — good as only few men are good, this Densie knew, and his joy at her halfway answer. Before morning she found herself beginning to plan, half shamedly, half gladly, about the future. Strangely the President's praise and requests melted like mist from her horizon. Only the future with James Gleason occupied her attention. John had asked for his freedom once — it had not been Densie's fault that he had not had it. And

Kenneth had given his heart away as the senator prophesied. How very wonderful it would be to enjoy an Indian summer!

Then followed the deluge of love letters, love letters as amusing as were Kenneth's, even more so since these two had the added wisdom of years to make them impressive. The senator was detained in Washington, fretting under the delay. But he would join Densie as soon as he possibly could and they would make definite arrangements as to the future —" the immediate future, dearest," he added, underlining the words.

As rosy cheeked as a schoolgirl Densie hid the letters in her secret drawer and spent half the day reading a book of love poems he had sent her. Her secretary suddenly discovered that the work for Mrs. Plummer was double what had been represented to her. But Densie good-naturedly engaged an assistant; she did not quibble over anything these days. She even smiled tenderly upon Geraldine and gave John a handsome scarfpin for his birthday, refusing his thanks almost brusquely; and she told Sally that love was the most wonderful thing in the world and she ought to keep romance alive. Just then Densie saw the world through rose-colored spectacles. No pair of lovers could be counted foolish. Her mission in life, as all normal women's when the heart is wooed and won, became microscopic in importance. Careers she admitted were naught but sedatives with which the loverless and unwanted drug themselves to still the ache of loneliness. The President would have been surprised if he could have seen the way in which Mrs. Plummer disposed of her affairs in the twinkling of an eye and devoted the best part of her day reading and answering letters from James Gleason.

The senator's friends had a brief but forcible way of summing up the situation. " Jim's a good fellow," they would concede, " a mighty good fellow — but there's no fool like an old fool! "

XXXVII

War broke over America to sober Eastertide, and Densie, jarred from selfish reverie, plunged again into the activities of her nation. Likewise the senator was preoccupied and overburdened with detail; director of energies, they soon learned to call him.

"We must not think of ourselves just now," Densie wrote Easter Sunday; "not for a little time at least. We must do what is needed without flinching, for who can say what will be needed of any one of us? I am so proud of you and your speech — I wanted to come and tell you so. That speech inspired me, and I shall take up the torch. If we get the ballot in my state this year I shall resign from all active suffrage work and give my time to war work and organizations. I am at your disposal in any such matters, and want suggestions. My dear, my dear, how wonderful it is to be both a boy and a strong statesman!"

As she sealed the letter she thought with scorn of her husband's attitude toward the war, and his commonplace comments.

"We're in it now and we'll have to go through," he had declared, "but we never need have gotten into it — never. Profiteers that did it, that's what it was. Watch the bank accounts of impecunious dealers grow — watch 'em and watch the middleman's shrink — watch the game, that's all I have to say."

Densie had indignantly refuted the facts, stating the principles of idealistic democracy which the younger nation had chosen to champion. She quoted several of

James Gleason's sentiments, but John only shook his head and declined to argue.

"This is a free country — up to now," he declared, "and I've the right to say it was never necessary to enter this war."

"Are you disloyal?" Densie's eyes were dangerous.

"No, I'll do whatever is asked. I stand by America and you know it. But I've my opinion, just the same."

So they dropped the subject and retired with their personal ideas regarding each other.

Densie posted the senator's letters herself; there was all the charm of a girl's stealing to the old oak tree at dusk to find the rustic letter box about mailing the senator's letters and marking them "Personal" in her prim firm hand. Returning from mailing one at the corner — she never posted them in the hotel — she heard a familiar whistle and turned to see Kenneth hurrying after her, his face white with excitement.

"I'm going to enlist," he said breathlessly. "I'm not going to wait to be called. I want to work my own way up and stand on my own merits. I don't want you to use your influence, mummy."

Densie felt a trifle faint. The great impersonal viewpoint of the war, the speech-making and relief organization, the directing of committees — was one thing, which required ability and special qualities of perseverance and aggressiveness, but these small silent sacrifices of one's son, just a common private, one's only son — were things which only the boy's mother and God would remember and understand.

"Ken, right away?" she said, ashamed as she spoke, for it might have been the way Geraldine Poole would have answered his heroism.

He had taken her arm and he bent over her anxiously.

"You sound like I know Gerry will sound," he said in surprise. "I thought you'd sing out for joy and make me feel all set up. You must; I cannot stand two weepers. Dad will growl, and Sally doesn't care. I thought you'd be proud — that you would want me to go before I was ordered. I want to begin like any other boy and make my own way."

"Oh, I do — of course."

But the words lacked the emphasis of her usual declarations. They went up to their rooms and found John reading the papers.

"Kenneth is going to enlist," Densie said as she stood beside her tall son and tried not to tremble. "He wants to go before he must. I am glad."

She knew her voice broke. The relief work, the committees, the speeches — were like phantoms beside a real flesh-and-blood sacrifice.

John dropped his paper, his rather dead eyes looked up at the boy and a glow of understanding came into them.

"You — young — rascal," he said slowly, trying to make himself appear indifferent, even humorous, but the timbre of his voice told Kenneth that at last his father thought him a man.

"I want to tell Gerry," he added. "She'll feel it most of all." This with unconscious selfishness. "So I'll dig out. I'm going in the Army, mummy; you better start knitting me a whole trousseau. I want to be very spoiled and babied and have a box every week I'm in camp. But I guess we won't linger in camp any too long — it's France for ours!" he finished joyously.

"Why don't you let me try and see if we cannot use you in some other place to more advantage?" Densie urged in spite of herself. "There are numbers of strong men with no brains — an officer supplies the brains —

and when a boy has both a strong body and brains he — he ought to think well before he casts his lot with common soldiers."

She took hold of his arm. She had pictured for so long the battlefields with their dead and dying, in order to rouse public generosity, that it all rushed over her now with a new, personal meaning. Supposing this boy, flesh of her flesh, idol of her heart, should lie dying some hideous winter's night —

"Let him alone," John was saying. "If he wants to start at the beginning, let him start." He held out his hand to Kenneth in silent understanding.

Kenneth grasped it eagerly. They seemed to come close in spirit — these two of such long-standing estrangement. And they both pitied the weakness of a woman — perhaps that was what drew them together.

After Kenneth had rushed off to Geraldine, John and Densie sat before the fireplace and waited for the other to speak.

The senator's love letters seemed trivial and absurd. Densie's work took the form of drudgery. She thought with dismay of the list of engagements on to-morrow's calendar. Her boy was going to enlist. She remembered Aunt Sally's Civil-War stories — the spirited, brave boys who marched jauntily away and who sent back those funny little knapsacks containing their trinkets. It was always some grizzled old man who came to tell of their death. Oh, how old everything could become all in an instant! She was old, old to her very heart; and, bitterest sting of all, Kenneth had told her hurriedly that he might spend hours consoling a flaxen-haired little doll who cared no more for him than she did for any stranger who could give her an equally handsome diamond ring. How little Gerry would care should he return maimed —

maimed. Her heart thumped so loudly she wondered if John could hear it. She glanced at him, but he was no longer sitting in a dejected, careless fashion; he was leaning over toward the little fire, his hands up to his cheeks, and his face was smiling, triumphant.

"John," she said suddenly, "our boy is going," and she smothered a sob. "This war — this awful, cruel war — was it necessary?"

He turned in surprise to look at her.

"Impersonal speeches don't hold when freedom asks for your youngest born, do they?" he said gently. "I'm proud of him. He's the stuff to win the damned thing. Why, we had to get into this scrap, Densie, even if we didn't want to because ——"

He began a quick, rather superficial but sincere summary of the situation, leading up to his argument that it was America's job to finish the fight and that his son was about to enlist — no slacker — no, sir — no waiting for a cotton-wool commission or a wheel-chair officer's job — no, by God, a soldier, a man with a gun! And he was proud of him. Most boys would have hidden behind their mothers' skirts and had them wield their influence, but not Kenneth Plummer.

Then as he saw tears on her cheeks and the expression of the dark blue eyes he added kindly: "But he's your son, Densie, so he would not have done differently."

"Thank you." Something about the compliment, as delicately formal as a sonnet to a French marquise, touched her. It was generous of John! "I must learn to knit everything — he must go well equipped — as well equipped as his mother — and — and his father can send him."

John thanked her vaguely, but he knew that Densie was thinking of the senator as the co-equipper.

Geraldine took the news just as everyone expected she would do. After several long reels of tears and protests she finally managed not to faint by dint of Kenneth's protecting arm, and proceeded to ask him if there would be any nice military hops held at camp and if there was any chance of her visiting him and meeting all the officers.

"Darling, this is war — it isn't military school. But I guess my mother will come to see me, and you can come with her."

"Your mother wouldn't want to take me; I know she wouldn't." Here she dissolved in fresh tears, "Oh, Ken, if you die I shall become a cloistered nun."

At that identical moment she was recalling a certain traveling man with whom she still corresponded.

"No, you must not"— youth does love to play at tragedy —"you must be very brave and live your life just as I would have had you do." This with an attempt at being masterful and protecting. "I shall leave a — a letter, you know, with my lawyer." The letter and lawyer were both new inspirations, and Kenneth decided to engage such a person and write such an epistle in the morning.

"What will be in the letter?" she asked rather coherently for such a weeping young person.

"I could not tell you now," he answered truthfully.

A trifle appeased Geraldine began other tactics.

"I want a lot of souvenirs from France, Ken. Do you think you could get me any gloves in Paris? I thought I remembered someone's saying how cheap they were, no one wants any white kid gloves over there now."

"I'll try — but I won't be thinking much of gloves. You see my theory is this," he said, dashing off into outlining an American campaign warranted to wreck the

stoutest of Teuton defenses. He even sketched something on the corner of an envelope, which Geraldine pretended to inspect, yawning as she did so.

Later she suggested, "Darling, let's be married before you go. I'd rather be a widow than an old maid." She looked at him in appeal.

"What would you live on?" the boy asked anxiously. "You know I've got to get my start by myself. I don't think we will, Gerry; not right away. Let's wait until I know I'm going over, then maybe it will be the best thing. I don't believe I could bear to leave you unless I knew you were all mine," he added softly. Kenneth was like Densie during the impersonal side of the war propaganda, the reality of it had not yet made itself felt. "Maybe I'll have won a commission then; you'd rather marry a d-dashing lieutenant than a common Sammy, now wouldn't you?" He kissed her hair.

"I want to marry you," she insisted. "I shall not let you go unless we are married — oh, how terrible war is!" she added pettishly.

After more comforting Kenneth suggested, "Can't you chirk me up; I need a few kind words as the old song goes. Don't go into more weeps! Why, even mummy wasn't up to the trick. It was father who said he was proud."

"I'm proud of you," wailed Geraldine, "but I love you so much! Ken, if we had a military wedding just think what a sensation if would be — and one of the first. If we wait much longer they'll be very common. We could have The Star-Spangled Banner played instead of Lohengrin, and you'd wear your uniform and I'd wear red, white and blue, and we'd have the wedding cake decorated with flags and I'd cut it with your sword!"

She was quite animated over the prospect.

" But I won't have any sword, maybe," Kenneth tried to explain.

After all, women were distressing when it came to the really big things of life, he thought. A man's quick handshake and a " you-old-rascal " were much more soul satisfying.

" Then you can rent one," she retorted.

At which Kenneth's sense of humor got the better of him and he laughed, thereby offending her mightily. After another hour of argument and protest and love avowals he left, frazzled to the last ounce and feeling as if he had done trench duty for a fortnight. Geraldine was left with her own thoughts — which no one but herself suspected.

Things might be worse, Kenneth was certain to be made an officer because of his mother. Then he would have a midsummer furlough and he could spend every hour of it with herself and they would plan for the wedding. She would also visit him at camp, there would be endless goodlooking men about, and before he sailed they would be married. As a young officer's widow — what worlds do lie before one!

Smiling discreetly she dashed off a coquettish note to the traveling man in Kankakee!

XXXVIII

Sally's conduct upon hearing the news was the most disquieting of all and equally unexpected. Kenneth despaired of understanding his womenfolks. He told his father about it.

"She just gave a scream you could hear two blocks and went into her bedroom and — bang — down she went, and there she lay across the bed sobbing and moaning like a regular leading lady. Now can you get it?"

"I suppose she meant to say she regretted your going," his father said rather sarcastically.

Kenneth had dropped into The Golden Rule Tea Store to impart this information. It was the first time he had come in to see his father in years, and the clerks looked at him curiously. John Plummer, forgetful of his apron, stood in the aisle talking to his son. Kenneth also seemed oblivious of the white apron and the gaping clerks. He had realized in the last twenty-four hours that even the most brilliant mummy in the world cannot be both father and mother, that there are certain father things that are distinctly out of her realm. This quiet encouraging camaraderie at such a time was one of them. It seemed good to be friends with his father, the shabby dad who lived like an unbidden shadow in his mother's apartment.

"That's a cheerful way to tell a chap — mummy turns white whenever she sees me, and can't talk about it. Geraldine was prostrated — poor little girl — and Sally

faints right off the bat. I suppose Harriet will write me one of her notes of evaporated affection and send me a pair of ear laps," he concluded cynically.

"You wanted to have a bit of a fuss made over you — that it?" asked his father. "Never mind, Ken, women are queer, they always do the thing you least expect and then are furious if you accuse them of having been anything but logical and consistent. I guess it will work out all right. Sally is all nerves anyway, and your mother will be brave at the finish. As for this Geraldine, I can't pretend to say."

"Rex came in before I left. I never liked him, but I must say that he acted white; wanted to get me a good set of field glasses. Decent, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes; Rex is decent in those ways."

And his father obeying a warning nod from the manager went back to dishing out spices and thinking with strange pride that his boy was one of the first to go. Hang it all, why wasn't it America's fight as much as anyone else's? Only he had failed to read the handwriting on the wall. Well, it was America's fight, and his boy was one of the first to go. No need urging it — no red tape, no exemption — no waiting for the draft. John Plummer absentmindedly weighed out overgenerous quantities of spice before he became conscious of his errors. He was heart and soul a patriot through the magic of personal sacrifice, ready to join the Knights of Liberty or to tar and feather the first pacifist caught skulking about his hearth.

Harriet did send a letter of evaporated affection and a gift. But Sally did not come out of it, as Kenneth and his father hoped. Even Densie, recovered from the shock, was amazed at her daughter's attitude. Rex gave the boy a handsome present and delivered it with a

speech of well wishing and congratulation. But Sally did nothing, refusing to see him or talk about it, and when her mother upbraided her in the matter her face turned that warning gray color that preceded a faint.

"What is it, Sally? This boy of ours needs all our sympathy," her father said one evening. He rarely saw Sally and he was shocked at the change he found. "It seems as if the lad's sister should stand by him — do some little thing."

He was looking at her magnificent costume of green net with mother-of-pearl trimming and a flat white-satin hat. She had dropped in to see her people on the way to a theater, but Densie was not home.

"Rex gave him something," she said bitterly.

"I know, but — it's the things women make that the boys like. He's our only boy, Sally; all we have to offer."

John laid his hand on her shoulder and drew her to him. There had come a great change in John Plummer since the night before Kenneth's enlistment — a regaining of his dignity. He was self-possessed and kindly, and the harsh discontent somewhat faded from his face.

"My girl, what bothers? I don't like the look in your eyes."

"Father," she answered with a great effort, "do not ask me about Ken. I tell you I cannot bear to make anything for him or talk to him or see him go. If he wants money all he has to do is tell me — for there is plenty of money. But let me alone; I have nothing to say. I hate the war! I won't think of it! And that is all."

"But is it — quite all?" he persisted.

"Oh, quite." She forced a smile. "Tell Ken I love him, but I'm not myself — I'll do better writing let-

ters to him. Besides he has mummy and Gerry and Harriet."

"But he wants Sally, too. He needs us all."

She broke away. "I'm so tired to-night, father; don't ask me anything more."

"But you are always tired, Sally, and yet you never do anything," he could not refrain from adding.

"Yes, isn't it funny?"

She almost screamed in a nervous frenzy, and before he could stop her she had gone.

The day Kenneth left, Densie had word from the senator that he would be in the city that evening. It gave her a false stimulus. She began telling herself sharply that her son was a minute sacrifice and much work must be done to keep the camp fires burning after he had gone. She had devoted as much time to Kenneth, *per se,* as was fair to her other duties; she resolved that after her visit with the senator she would begin again to do all that was expected of her.

Sally did not say good-by to the boy; she feigned a headache and sent him an incoherent note. Rex delivered it with apologies and profuse well wishes, but Kenneth was aggrieved at the neglect.

"I might have gone in to see her," he complained to his mother. "It isn't the way Sally used to be — why can't she bear the war? It is her war as much as mine. Gerry is coming to the station," he supplemented proudly.

And Gerry did, only to burden him with fudge and photographs and to be the last to touch his hand and kiss his ilps, turning with supercilious scorn to say to John Plummer, "I suppose you wish you were young again!"

At which John thought of the worse fates awaiting a

man than a bullet, and Densie turned away to hide a smile.

That night John Plummer went walking, tramping up and down lonely, poorly lighted streets so that only his thoughts might keep him company. He wanted to rejoice in his son, in the new meaning of fatherhood, in his pride. He wanted to wonder leisurely why Sally would not bid her brother good-by; to fancy what Sam Hippler would have said, and Uncle Herbert and Aunt Sally; to picture how, if they were still at the Little House, they would have given the boy a joyous send off, a real old-time party with two kinds of cake and homemade ice cream, the piano jingling tempting dance music and the older folk sitting back to smile approval on the young; and of how the minister would have come in to say a simple prayer of godspeed and the boys and girls would have gathered round the young soldier to pledge their friendship anew — and how very good it would have been to have had all this happen!

At the same time Densie and the senator were talking somewhat of Kenneth, but more of themselves and a little of the war situation and new duties confronting each.

"I'm glad he went as he did," the senator told Densie. "However, we will keep an eye on him; there will be the right moment for helping him on a bit."

"It makes romance seem very thin, doesn't it?" Densie asked presently. "We haven't the right to our Indian summer yet. Suppose if the boy were decorated — or killed — and his father and I divorced! It would rob either the honor or the sorrow of its dignity. Not yet, dear," she ended wistfully.

"But some day?" he urged. Just then the cares of state lay lightly on them both.

"Some day," she assented, but in her heart it did not thrill her as formerly.

Kenneth's camp letters were amusing and wholesome; they robbed war of its sinister meaning. After a little Densie was accustomed to his absence, she knew he was doing the thing which was his duty and it satisfied her. She was too busy with impersonal things to miss him personally. For she was seldom at home — and out of the city the greater part of the time. She was in demand for campaign work throughout her state. Her secretary demanded still another assistant, which was forthcoming; and even the senator grumbled that she cheated him of his rights, she ought to give him one hour on Sundays which was not punctuated heartlessly with telephones and calling patriots who all thought that Mrs. Densie Plummer would know just the right thing to do.

Once, from a sense of duty, Densie asked Geraldine to luncheon, but she was so bored with the girl's senseless drivel that she was thankful her son was at camp, since he would surely see Geraldine as she really was upon his return. She had intended taking Geraldine when she visited the camp, but she so irritated her that Densie canceled her resolve.

When she visited Kenneth and explained that Geraldine was too impossible to bring along, that she, Densie, was too occupied with duties to bear with a giggling flapper, Kenneth said very little. But Densie saw her error. She realized he would have rather seen the giggling flapper than his mother, and he asked more questions about his father than about anyone else.

"I expect a summer furlough," he said when Densie was leaving, "and I'll make it up to Gerry then. Poor little girl, it is hard on her, mummy; you should have thought of that."

Which gave Densie food for reflection on her journey back, though when she phoned Geraldine the next afternoon her mother said she was motoring with an out-of-town friend who had just happened in and demanded to be entertained. This gave Densie still further reflective food. Wisely, she did not write Kenneth the news.

Densie Plummer forgot her thirty-fifth wedding anniversary until Sally sent over some handsome flowers. All at once she recalled the day, and wondered if John remembered. She decided to thank Sally personally and stem any hint of sentimental memories which might try to sweep over her. This was no time for emotion. She scribbled a few hasty lines to Kenneth, fondly locked away the senator's latest letter and took a taxi to Sally's hotel.

Rex was leaving as she came in.

"Good morning, Mother Plummer," he began graciously. "Many happy returns of the day — Sally never remembers our anniversary, isn't she the wretch? But she had your florist's order placed a week ago. Well, what of the boy?" He was laughing down at her, mocking her, it seemed.

Densie stared rudely at him, she was thinking that he seemed to be younger in some ways than her own daughter.

"Very well, I brought his last letter. He'll be home shortly; then you can see for yourselves. Harriet is as well as she ever seems to be; she has had another advance in her work."

Rex left them, bowing respectfully to his mother-in-law and kissing Sally on her cheek, during which Sally sat as unmoved as an Elgin marble.

"Don't you want to read Ken's letter?" Densie

asked. "You usually have hysterics if I try to read them to you."

"If he's well that is enough — I'll send him a hamper of things."

"Don't; they have good fare and this Geraldine person makes fudge daily, I believe. Save your money, Sally. Uncle Sam is going to need it."

"I had a letter from Dean Laddbarry," Sally said unexpectedly. "He has just formed a company, an alfalfa industry of some kind. At this time it may be expedient — a food substitute — he is to make tea, flour, extract, Heavens — a complete larder, for all I know. He has had chemists analyze the stuff and pronounce it fit, and he wrote to say he had heard that Ken was in training and he would like his address. His company is being operated with government sanction, which is his way of doing his bit. It was a nice letter. Dean never changes!"

Densie was silent; that warm flowing current under the ice coating would stir at most inopportune times.

"I sent the flowers because I knew father would never think of the day — and the senator would hate it, because it was not his anniversary too." She smiled at her demure mother. "I wonder what you will do with the senator. Come, fess up to your weary old married child. You're only fifty-three, and you look thirty-five — and you know the senator cares very hard."

"Sally," Densie protested, "with your brother in training and father ——"

"In a linen apron! Mummy! Why not be truthful as you used to suggest to me — what's the harm? I'd like to see you mistress of Glen Laurie."

"What would you do with your father?" Densie could not refrain from adding.

War or no war, what woman can resist the prospect of a wedding?

"Oh, we'd find another Mrs. Starr," Sally answered flippantly. "Please don't leave Ken's letter — send it to Harriet. You know I've no brains these days. I couldn't read it with any understanding."

"You read Dean's," suggested her mother.

"Tit for tat — eh?" Sally laughed at the turned tables.

John did remember the anniversary. All day the panorama of the past unrolled itself before him — the wedding, Densie in her going-away dress of dove-colored broadcloth, tilts and curves and fussy rosettes, the dotted chenille veil to hide her blushes, the love of a bonnet — his own tall self, top hatted, with a brave mustache and a paddock, bottle-green coat! The wedding journey, the blessed, glorious young time of their romance — and, sweetest of all, the return home!

"God bless our home," Densie had said reverently at the first meal together.

And they had wandered through the rooms like delighted children to exclaim over everyone's kindness and their good fortune — finally, they stood under the mahogany framed picture of the Child, which Aunt Sally had given them from The Evergreens, a rare print that had been her mother's, the same picture under which the three children had later stood when they recited their Bible verses on a Sunday morning — and as they paused, John remembered Densie's saying: "I feel He does bless us, John!"

Well, that was thirty-five years ago, and it was all ended. So he hurried about the store taking off canvas covers and unnailing boxes and trying to stop remember-

ing, wondering in between customers as to his boy and why Sally could not bear to talk of the war.

That night Densie waited for him; she was sorry she had not remembered the day ahead of time so she could dine with him, irksome though it might be. But it was too late to readjust her schedule. So she waited to explain and say some polite thing of scant meaning.

When she saw him she knew what had happened. The warm flowing current rose in rebellion against the ice coating. As she had once been able to read his thoughts and those of her children so she reclaimed temporarily her ability.

He did not hesitate to confirm her fears. "I'm discharged, Densie," he said quietly. "I'm too old to be working for someone else, they said — like Sam Hippler. They say I am set in my ways and irritable. F-funny, isn't it — to be called old at fifty-five?" He almost shuffled across the room to find his pipe. "I shan't stay about here. It isn't fair to you. I want to see the boy first, and then I'm off to begin again — farm, I think. I'd like to get back to where things grow. Perhaps it isn't as rough luck as it sounds."

He sank into his chair and puffed moodily away.

"I am sorry," she said politely — but she knew it was not true. She was not sorry. Her shame at having a clerk for a husband would be ended. She would help him start a farm and regain his grip on things — that was only fair if she was to marry James Gleason.

"I'll advance whatever you need," she offered. It was impossible to mention a wedding anniversary at this juncture.

He started up angrily, his face flushed, his voice broken.

" I'll take no more of a woman's money — no matter ıow things have changed about! "

Late that night Densie wrote the senator what had ıappened.

" It will work out for the best, I am sure, but we must ıe patient. My husband must get a fresh start — for ıe is still in his prime. It was a severe and undeserved ılow as nearly as I can tell. . . . Do you understand vhy I have written as I have? "

To which the senator promptly replied: " Nothing errifies me, dearie-dear, I shall brook every obstacle. ştart the whole world again if you like. But you must ıelong to me. Be brave, we shall make trials vanish as f we waved a fairy wand instead of mortal fingers! "

This comforted Densie. She even decided to broach :he subject of financing John's farm plan again. He was penniless and he must do something. His pride would soon retire in favor of common sense. She so honestly wished him well that she would make him agree :o her ideas. She had cured herself of cabin fever and ;he had been as penniless as John. It was John's turn :his time!

XXXIX

Kenneth's furlough came in August. The senator had seen to that, for Densie still had hopes that her boy might be given a commission or some sort of ordnance work. With all her bravery for other mothers and wives her boy seemed set apart, that he must not march to the trenches with the other shuffling, obedient feet.

Geraldine had decided that this furlough would be the time for her marriage. To allow Kenneth to go to France without making her his wife was quite unfair. She wanted to be known as "young Lieutenant Plummer's girl bride" or "Mrs. Rex Humberstone's sister-in-law."

To this plan her parents agreed. After the first effusive greeting Geraldine broached the subject. But Kenneth laughed at her.

"Gerry, we'd be as poor as church mice. What would you live on?"

"Oh, but you'll be an officer and have a lot of field decorations. You are bound to; your mother won't let you stay a common soldier. And I love you so much — and you may never come back."

"All the more reason we ought not marry." Kenneth was serious; he did not see she was play-acting and underneath her heartbroken, affectionate attitude was shrewd calculation, and that her tears were forced and sparse of quantity.

"But we love each other — war is such a monster! Ken, I can't be happy unless I belong to you."

Kenneth disengaged himself and paced up and down

the room. He looked well in his uniform, Gerry was not the only one who admitted it. Sally and his mother had been superlative in their praises, while his father had gazed at him with proud reserve — as if the matter were something which men never mentioned, but took for granted.

"Geraldine," he said slowly, "I don't believe we understand what marriage means — or war. And when marriage and war coincide as they do in our case I think we ought to be awfully sure of ourselves. We've got to go over there and fight our blooming heads off to whip these beggars, and you people have got to stay home and save your money and do your part. You've no idea of what there is ahead and of what we want to do — and are going to. The end is clear, but the way is not yet." Then he laughed boyishly. "I don't mean to play the terrifying ogre, dear. Don't cry — please." He came and sat beside her.

"It does frighten me — cannons and being shot at sunrise — and those pretty Red Cross nurses — English girls — they say you are bound to fall in love with them!" Which was the only honest fear Geraldine had so far expressed. "I know papa and mamma wouldn't want me to be engaged to a soldier — it's too uncertain."

"Then why marry one?"

"Oh, that's different — it is all settled then," she said in a clear and emotionless voice. She saw her opportunity, and before her real meaning could appeal to the boy she added, "Ken, are you tired of me? Oh, yes! Yes, you are — you don't want to be tied to poor little stay-at-home me!"

"Nonsense!" He gathered her roughly in his arms. "You think I don't love you, Gerry? Why, I'll do any-

thing in the world you say — I've written you every night of my life, haven't I? I've dreamed of you ——"

"Your mother wouldn't take me with her to camp," she sulked.

"Mummy had to have so many people talk to her that she couldn't put herself in your place, she didn't realize how you felt. I'd have rather seen you, darling. And I want to protect you and do what is right. You understand — don't you? Only, everything has changed since I've been in camp. I stopped being just an atom and living an atom's existence, and I'm on the brink of helping do something big, coming face to face with reality. And no one can ever be quite the same afterward — the fellows all agree on that. You cannot go over there to fight, to offer your life for the great cause, and then come back the same old two-by-four petty person. Just because I feel I'm going to change I want to be really myself before we marry — no transitional, nerve-shattered person that is liable to disappoint you or make you unhappy. It wouldn't be fair. Suppose I'm gassed, or maimed, captured — how can you tell what difference it might make to you? That's the danger of marrying a soldier before he sees service — you never know how he is going to be afterward. But I love you — love you — love you!" he punctuated the words with kisses.

Geraldine was quietly furious. If she could not marry this soldier she would take steps to have him become the old plastic Kenneth who would do her bidding unquestioned. But she was wise enough merely to pout and look unusually pretty.

"I may change, too," she objected. "How about that? All the good-looking men won't be in France. Suppose I change?"

Kenneth only laughed. "Why, here we are fighting

phantoms. And when we know we really care and will be married as soon as it is right, why do we waste precious hours of my stay in town? I won't be serious again or let you be — not another tear — we are going to have the time of our lives! Promise me!" He kissed her cheek.

Geraldine brightened. "I want you for the Fassett dance next Friday," she said cleverly, "I've said you could stay until then."

Kenneth frowned. "Don't it beat all? I'm due at camp Thursday morning; that would make me two days late. I can't, darling; honestly, I can't."

"But you are not fighting battles — and what does two days' difference make? Please, Ken! You can explain it to your senior officer — your mother can write a note." She was unconscious of the grim humor of the last.

Kenneth was perplexed. "We won't fuss about the Fassett dance now; we'll crowd in all the good times we can and never mind if we miss one dance. You know a soldier's first duty is obedience, Gerry, and I cannot say I stayed two days overtme for a dance!"

"Get extra leave," she suggested promptly, her eyes narrowing.

If she was defeated in being a war bride she was not going to be defeated in having Kenneth as a partner for the Fassett dance. She was determined to disgrace him in some way.

"Gerry, you don't understand — if you'd been at camp you would have known. We're an Army in the making and raw as raw can be. Why, I could tell you stories of the mother-boys and homesick duds and mere flukers that would make you feel apprehensive when you thought of facing the Hun fighting machine. We have

got to be whipped into shape and dig in and make good. And that's just what they are doing to us too."

But Geraldine was not stirred from her own resolve. She put her arms about his neck and whispered, "But, Ken, there's a terrible man staying at the Fassetts', he wants to marry me. Oh, it has been very hard to avoid him and not let the Fassetts know what a persistent suitor he is. I told him my fiancé would be here and take me to the dance; he said he bet he would not, and I said I would wager everything in the world that he would. Ken, darling, please stay over — won't you? If you love me; if — you — love me."

She kissed him with a quick, rapturous little way, all her own!

Kenneth did not answer. Finally he said, "Do you love this man?" His face was white with jealous apprehension.

"No — yet he fascinates me, he has a sort of influence over me — I cannot bear to be with him alone. I'm such a silly little creature. You must go with me and let me keep my promise. You see I told him you would come."

"Couldn't you give up the dance?"

"Oh, no! That would be an admission of defeat; and you ought to see my new dress! Why, Ken, boys stay overtime, don't they?"

"We haven't had furloughs yet — it's all so devilish new for everyone — we don't know yet what we can do and what we can't — we only know we ought to obey. I don't like to, Gerry; please don't ask it. Let me write this man and tell him we are engaged, please ——"

She shook her frizzled, brainless head.

"No! Either go to that dance or never speak to me again!" She drew off her engagement ring.

Kenneth stopped her. "I'll — I'll stay over," he said thickly.

She flung her arms about him. "You're a dear," she whispered, "and I adore you!"

"I wish you might have understood the situation and let me off," he pleaded, "I ought not, Gerry, really, I ought not. It may be serious."

She shook her head again and told him he had pledged his word — and what did two little days amount to — think of the food they would save! If Geraldine had had her way the most active part she would have allowed Kenneth to take in the war would be to collect used phonograph needles and send them to the Government as a steel donation.

Densie and her son had each tried to fit into the other's spare moments. Densie was crowded with her work, and yet she longed to be with her boy. She felt a certain jealousy when she would have to hurry off in the morning and leave him talking happily with his father. She often wondered what these two talked about; they never said. It would be too early an hour for Geraldine to be up or for Sally to have had her coffee and Rex cleared out of the way, so Kenneth and his father would walk in the park if the day was fair and talk as two newly found and cherished friends would do.

John had not told of his discharge. He felt a keen shame in confessing it to this soldier son. It would be time enough to let him know when he was on his farm and out of Densie's way. No one would miss him but Kenneth, and after the boy was married he too would feel it was a sensible arrangement. So he told Kenneth

he was taking his vacation because he did not feel well, and the boy, too occupied with his own projects and worries, did not doubt the statement.

Again, Densie returning for luncheon would find Kenneth engaged at the telephone making violent love to Geraldine. Sometimes she would stand aside and smile at the terms of endearment that flew over the wire.

"Ken, dear, don't you think central might hear you?" she urged.

"Bother central! The more I see of Gerry the more I love her. She is the dearest girl in the world — and you're the most clever," he would add.

"Thanks, dearie. What's on the programme for to-day?"

Kenneth would tell her — it was mostly Geraldine, with a faint smattering of calls or talking to his father.

"Why didn't you take Gerry to camp?" he asked again, the day before the Fassett dance.

"Oh, she really isn't my sort. I couldn't. All she knows is clothes and how to make those great baby eyes at strangers. Of course, she is a dear," she hastened to add, "but she is not all I would wish for you."

Kenneth's face was flushed. "A man doesn't marry to please his mother."

"I will make her welcome, but I feel she is not the woman you will love when you are forty."

Kenneth was silent.

"You have until Saturday morning?" Densie asked. "Rather decent!"

He looked away. "Yes, it is," he said shortly.

"You won't be back until Christmas, will you?"

"Not then, maybe."

"Look at me, Ken. What are you hiding?" Densie tried to understand the expression in the dark

eyes. "You acted sheepish — ashamed. What is it?"

"You imagine it, mummy." He began fussing with some papers on the table.

"Saturday morning — I must be at the train." She made a note of it.

"Oh, do!" he said aimlessly.

After he had left for the Fassett dance Densie wondered again as to his manner. She too halfway anticipated a foolish marriage, and she wondered if this had been the reason for his confusion. But surely her boy would not have barred her from his confidence — not Kenneth! She dismissed the matter because of other duties and went to sleep only to dream of him as a small clear-eyed boy saying, "I am going to be a captain," and of a grim voice from out of nowhere answering, "What a pity — what a grave pity!"

Geraldine and Kenneth were counted the most handsome couple at the Fassett dance. And to her delight Geraldine flaunted her soldier in the face of the presuming Fassett guest, while all the girls looked at her with envy and whispered that she was more lucky than she deserved.

Geraldine declined to get up early enough to see him off Saturday morning; it always gave her a dreadful headache if she did not have enough sleep, she explained. Besides, his family would be at the train and she did not think she would be missed. The strain of saying good-by in public would be entirely too much. She would say good-by in her own home after the dance — in her own way.

"I don't know my own mind yet," Geraldine told him the very last thing. "Sometimes I think it would be a mistake to marry you. I better marry an older man,

like your sister Sally did. It is terribly romantic!"

Kenneth wondered if he heard correctly. "Is this a joke, Gerry? Don't, darling, when I have to leave you ——"

Geraldine giggled foolishly. "You don't think I'm going to bow down and adore you because you wear a uniform, do you? I won't be anyone's slave. I do like you, Ken, and you are fascinating"— this with an artful smile —"or else I would not have asked you to go to the dance and monopolize me like a cave man. You don't seem to realize that this other man is a millionaire and very clever in his own line of work. Because if I should marry him he would plan a home for me equal to any European castle. I forgot to tell you he was a wonderful architect."

Kenneth looked at her like a forlorn and suddenly deserted child.

"I say, Gerry, this is a bit thick."

Geraldine shrugged her useless pretty shoulders as if she were bored with the entire world, particularly the corner of the world occupied by Kenneth Plummer.

"I can't help it, Ken, I must be honest — you know I'm always that — and you said you wanted me to be sure of myself. You made quite a point of it. I really had to have you go to the dance, because I wanted the contrast between you and Nat; it was the only way for me to make sure which of you won. Even yet I'm undecided. Too bad, isn't it, when you have to rush away to-morrow? Well, maybe you'll have a surprise — maybe you'll see me again before you think."

"But you said — why, you wanted me to marry you." He was floundering about in a bewildered state of mind. "Gerry, what has come over you? You must be joking, but it hurts — can't you understand? It means so much,

and it's war, Gerry, not a game we're playing down there ——"

She drew out a note from the bosom of her dress. "Oh, I'm joking, am I?" she asked, holding it out for him to read.

In a man's writing was the message:

"Do I win or lose? Let me know soon or I'll leave town at once. NAT."

Kenneth crumpled the note and tossed it on the floor.

"Well, he shall not have you!" he said harshly. "I'll tell you that much! You are mine. I overstayed my leave for you, and I wouldn't have done that for anyone else in this world — not even for my own mother. You said you wanted me at the dance for protection — not contrast; that this man frightened and fascinated you; you were quite clear in your own mind whom you wanted to marry when you coaxed me into overstaying my leave! Tell me the truth, Geraldine, are you just playing with me?"

Something in the set of his mouth and a glint in his tired eyes warned Geraldine she had overstayed her own power and she had better hasten to take refuge in the eternal tears and tremblings.

"Oh, you're cross — all cross! He was cross too. I won't love either of you!" She began to sob.

Kenneth's head was addled and he was physically exhausted. He sat dejectedly in a near-by chair.

"I'm all in," he said disconsolately. "I ought to have gone back on time. If you didn't care enough for me to see me do my duty I guess I ought not to have cared enough for you to have forgotten it! That's about all there is to it."

Geraldine peeked from a corner of her handkerchief.

"Don't you want me to be sure of myself," she reiterated, "and be honest? You talked about being changed — gassed and losing your nerve and everything horrid you could say. And I just want to be alone and think it all out — I shan't sleep a wink to-night. I'll be too busy deciding whether it is to be you or Nat. Then I'll tell you — maybe I'll come down to camp and see you. Your mother did." She pouted slightly as she spoke. "I want to come to camp terribly — they say you have a wonderful time and everyone makes a lot of fuss over you — is that true?"

"Well, don't come rushing down without letting me know first and without bringing your mother. Now, remember, Gerry, that holds. You can't play off any impulsive stuff at camp. Great Scott, it's war!" Kenneth felt tense and irritable, as if he never wanted to hear this girl's thin sweet voice or see her baby-doll face with the great staring eyes as cold as pale-green water flowing under ice. "Write and tell me your decision and let it go at that — it's pretty late and I've got to pack. I shan't sleep, either. If you decide you want to wait for me and be my wife I'll try to make you happy, and if you want to marry this other fellow — well, I'm going to try not to be too unhappy."

And despite her protests and veiled apologies and kisses, for she saw her error too late to retract it, Kenneth left her to walk home in the early sultry morning, entirely conscience-stricken at what he had done, yet fairly sick with longing to have Gerry love him and be sure of herself! He still took her seriously!

His father and mother wondered at his white set face as he bade them good-by, and at the grouchy manner in which he answered Sally's questions. Something had gone wrong between himself and Geraldine they all knew.

"I feel as if I had said good-by to him," Densie told Sally as they drove home, John sitting in the front of the car busy with his own thoughts. "Did you notice how unnatural he seemed? He scarcely smiled, and his kisses were a pretense."

"Some quarrel with that girl," Sally said slowly, her lips curving in scorn. "We eat our hearts out at Ken's age over a lovers' quarrel. Never mind, mummy, camp will set him right — and if it is a lasting quarrel, let us all give thanks."

"Indeed we will," Densie agreed. "Just drop me off here, Sally, that is a dear. I'll run in to headquarters to see how the world is prospering."

John tipped his hat to her as she did so. They had not spoken alone since Kenneth had been at home. Sally sank back in relief at having no one to whom she had to talk, and she said good-by to her father almost brusquely when he reached the hotel. She was afraid, since he was idle, that he would come inside to visit her. She wanted to go to her room and sob for sheer relief — her nerves had grown to demand it these days!

XL

Sunday Densie received a wire. She was expecting her usual day letter from the senator. So she did not open it before John, but waited until she went to her room.

A moment later John, who was figuring up the cost of farm implements and planting, heard a stifled cry.

He wondered if it was imagination; Densie never succumbed to emotion, her tears had been spirited away as had been her cabin fever. Nevertheless, he went to her door and rapped.

"John!" he heard her call as she had not called in years.

Opening the door he found her half lying, half kneeling beside her bed, the yellow paper drifting maliciously toward the carpet.

She pointed to it with a trembling inefficient hand. As he picked it up the printed words flared up at him as if imps lighted them from some magical apparatus to make each letter seem framed in fire. The message read:

"Your son Kenneth Plummer fatally wounded this morning. Was escaping guardhouse. Overstayed furlough."

John folded it methodically. Then he went to his wife and took her in his arms. Grief had released the pent-up emotion so long held in check and she clung to him helplessly.

"Dearest," he said gently, "shall we go?"

"Wire that I will come — wire we will come," she

corrected. Then she sank down on the bed, her face buried in the pillows.

Shot while escaping the guardhouse — overstayed furlough — the words came and sat about her pillows, they were formed of jagged cruel letters, the words danced together sometimes in an incoherent mass and then danced back and separated into words or strung themselves out in a scraggly line or circled about in a whirl of tragic confusion.

She wondered if John would make all arrangements for them to go, she would rather remain here with these word phantoms to keep impressing on her what had happened — she would rather John went — he was the boy's father. How odd that she should suddenly think of him as being strong and capable; he had called her "dearest"— like a faint rose-scented echo of the past — and had asked her if they would go. The words were banding about her like mocking little devils, they fairly hissed their message. Her boy was dead. Murdered! She sat upright and beat her hands together senselessly, escaping the guardhouse — her boy to escape punishment — no, worse than that — her boy to deserve punishment! There crept into her consciousness the memory of Geraldine Poole's selfish little face with the too closely set blue eyes and the heavy scarlet mouth. Overstayed his time. And he had barely said good-by to them. So that was the trouble — why, the escaping? even if he had deserved punishment, to try to evade it. There must be a mistake; surely there was some mistake.

John returned, he tiptoed clumsily as men do about a sick room.

"I have phoned for reservations — but I — I have no money."

He did not look at her.

She pointed to her purse.

"Will you go alone, John? I do not think I could bear it. I want to be here when he comes home for the last time."

Later in the afternoon she knew John set some tea beside her and asked if he should bathe her forehead with cologne as he had done years and years ago. She said "Yes," and so he sat dabbling the handkerchief over the pitiful, quivering features and whispering to be brave — it was God's will. Poor John! That old, time-worn phrase of Aunt Sally's was all he could find in his own agony of mind and soul to offer by way of comfort — God's will!

"Have you told Sally?" she asked.

He nodded.

"And wired Harriet?"

"Yes. Lie still, dearest — unless you drink some tea."

"I wonder," she murmured, her eyes glazed and ominous, "I wonder if he suffered. Do you think he suffered, John?" She grasped his hand until it left a reddish mark.

"We will soon know, my dear. Lie down and rest — lie down."

"It was that girl — that girl who killed him." She kept repeating this in a shrill tone. "She has murdered him."

Then she began to laugh and say it was all for the best, the trenches were so much worse, the letters and diaries which had come overseas told of such horrors — perhaps it was for the best. Did John understand what she was telling him? The agony of the trenches was spared their boy — but he had been murdered by a para-

site — a rebel doll! She had made him overstay his time. Well, it was for the best — hadn't John told her it was God's will — how comforting that was, after all! God's will! Was it not queer that she seemed to see her boy as a little fellow in kilts — plaid kilts and a ruffled white blouse and a black velvet cap — as he used to be when he tagged after her or tried to play with the girls and they complained of his being too much of a baby. It was very queer that Sally did not come to her mother; did she not realize that her only brother was murdered? But he was spared the agony of the trenches! And she wanted John to write Dean Laddbarry, because Dean had always loved Kenneth, everyone was fond of him and so everyone would be glad he was spared the trenches. He had said, so long ago, "I am going to be a captain, mummy." And now he was dead! He was standing close beside her — surely John could see — in that funny boy sweater of green and a bean button made from cigarette flags, and he was asking in his changing soprano-bass voice about a baseball game and what were the chances for a blueberry pie! Oh, yes, it was for the best — she wanted Geraldine to know, she wanted to see if she had really cared — but she would skulk like a guilty coward. And yet, her boy was spared the trenches.

After a long time she said more rationally, "If he had died a hero, had done what he longed to do — it — would not be so hard. But to be shot escaping the guardhouse — my boy. John, something tells me I must learn a great lesson from this death. That if he did not die for his country he shall not die in vain. I shall take to myself the lesson, whatever it may be."

After John left for the night train Densie lay alone, staring into the darkness and seeing the words of the

telegram dancing about in irregular confusion. She wondered why her daughter did not come to share her grief. Then she was roused by a ring of the doorbell.

She managed to answer it, thinking it was Sally. But it was a bell boy, agog with curiosity, holding out a silly little tray with a silly little note.

Densie took it mechanically. She supposed the boy must be normal, but he seemed to her to have a dozen grinning mouths and a dozen pairs of coarse black eyes peering rudely. She closed the door and went back to her room to read the message. It was from Traynor, the hotel manager — a suave note which expressed all manner of sympathy and condolence to Mrs. Plummer, but he hoped that she understood the rules of the hotel and that she would not ask that they be broken, there were no funerals permitted.

No funerals from the hotel! Of course not, now that she thought of it. Hotels were places for transients — persons who desired no home. Her boy could not even come home for his last silent farewell. They had no home. She had, step by step, destroyed it. Was that the great lesson she must learn?

Later Densie received word from Harriet's hotel that Miss Plummer had suffered a nervous breakdown and was under a doctor's care; she could not bear the journey.

But it made little impression on Densie, though she began to realize that hotels are not for sick persons either. Only homes shelter the maimed, the young, the helpless, the failures — and welcome their own dead! And she had destroyed her home. She looked about in slow, bewildered fashion as if she were a stranger suddenly ensconced in the smart hotel rooms. She had no home. It was far better Harriet did not come. And Kenneth, her only son, must lie in some sleek chapel

of an undertaker — as do the unidentified dead to whom the papers devote an obscure paragraph. No home — no home! But he was spared the agony of the trenches. Those two phrases ran a race in her tortured mind, first the home was winning, then the agony of the trenches ran beyond, threatening to win; then no home dashed up in triumph; then the other — and so on.

She tried to go to bed and rest and wonder vaguely what she would have done without John Plummer. John had no home either. Oh, they had strayed far, far from the cradle of civilization — the home. As she lay, dry-eyed and wide awake she thought, "Is the agony of the trenches worse than this?" She fancied the newspaper headlines: "Densie Plummer's Son Shot — Deserting Guardhouse." The reporters crowding in on her; how she had grown to want them to crowd about and ask for interviews! What a bomerang! She could see the flowers, the senseless, overfragrant blossoms in fantastic shapes of pillows and stars and anchors and what not that would smother her boy's casket — the telegrams and telephones and messages of condolence from the world at large — they rose like mere phantoms and joined the mocking words of the telegram. She would have to pay dearly for her fame! She could not grieve alone — in her own home with the common, sacred friends of her common sacred life to help her through the trial. There were no common sacred friends. They, too, had left her. But she had John. No thought of the senator so much as crossed her mind.

Not until morning, which brought with it a graver, saner grief, did Densie remember the senator and wire him. She added, "Do not come — wait until you hear from me." She felt it sacrilege to have this strange

man of romance so much as touch her hand while her dead boy, John Plummer's son, lay above the ground — even though it be in some public chapel!

She gave a statement to the reporters in a stilted, controlled fashion. They referred to it as "Mrs. Plummer's wonderful self-control already demonstrated in her battle for civic rights," and so on.

Then she sent for Geraldine Poole. She waited for her coming as a monarch does an arch traitor. She wanted to hear from the girl's lips the forced confession of her own perfidy and to call her the name she deserved. She had cast Sally from her thoughts; she seemed unimportant, as did Harriet. Only that long telltale box coming in the baggage car and Geraldine Poole's story mattered. Oh yes, John mattered; she wanted him to bathe her head with cologne and call her "dearest" again. And she could cry like a woman when John was near her. With the rest of the world she was the formal person of affairs, dry eyes and strained of expression.

John would have reached there by now, he would have heard details, be preparing to bring his son — not home, but "back"— that was the best they could say.

But only Mrs. Poole appeared to face Densie's storm of anger and reproach. She was red-eyed and tremulous, very, very afraid that her little girl had run off to camp and some unexplainable tragedy had happened. Oh, did Mrs. Plummer think that Geraldine was safe and unharmed?

Without warning Geraldine had taken a train Saturday night and left a note saying she would spend Sunday and Monday with Kenneth at camp, that she must explain something to him, something that worried her. Didn't Mrs. Plummer realize that she was only an

impulsive baby thing and that she loved Kenneth better than anyone else in the world? Oh, Mr. Poole was very angry to think Kenneth had so great an influence over his only child that she would run away like a servant; he was certain Kenneth had arranged the trip and had coaxed her into agreeing. It had been a shameful thing to do, as if he just hadn't had a furlough and monopolized Geraldine entirely! At any rate Geraldine had gone to Kenneth's camp, and now she was beside herself with anxiety as to Geraldine's safety.

What a dreadful thing it was — Geraldine would never recover from the shock! She had no idea it was naughty to make him overstay his time — dear, no, Geraldine was the most patriotic little person in the world, always begging for the Red Cross and crying over the war films in the movies — she never realized that it was wrong to coax her fiancé to stay over a day or so — military life was terribly strict, wasn't it?

After which Mrs. Poole collapsed and thus extricated herself from further conversation. It was all a trick and cleverly done, because she did not dare to stand up beside this injured mother and try her feeble arguments and explanations.

"My son never asked her to visit him at camp. He would have insisted on a chaperone. If there was a misunderstanding it was of Geraldine's deliberate making; and in some fit of remorse — for Kenneth had promised her gold beads," she added with a little catch in her voice —"she simply lost her head and rushed down there. My son was pledged to serve his country first, not your daughter. No girl who has a man overstay his time is worthy of his attention or respect. It is feminine treason."

But Mrs. Poole was in the throes of fainting and say-

ing very weakly, "He was of age — and had a mind of his own ——"

To which Densie paid no attention.

"She coaxed him to overstay his time and he was put in the guardhouse. Undoubtedly he escaped to see this mad little creature, who ran down there to bring him to his death — he was infatuated and she knew it. She took advantage of his sincerity."

By this time Mrs. Poole had fainted in entirety, and there was nothing but a foolish contemptible little bundle to be carried out of Densie's apartment.

The truth would be told her by John; he alone knew why Kenneth had escaped the guardhouse.

The afternoon papers printed everyone's picture who was associated with the family. Geraldine's was in a wreath of ivy and entitled "Grief-stricken Little Sweetheart Who Thoughtlessly Caused Kenneth Plummer's Death." And Densie was represented in one of her evening creations as "Well-Known and Brilliant Mother of Slain Youth."

Sally's picture was with Rex, taken on their honeymoon, and a long account of Harriet's brilliant statistical work took the place of her photograph. At the end of the story was the line, "John Plummer has gone to bring back the body."

Early that evening Sally came to her mother. She carried heavily packed traveling bags.

"I could not come before," she said briefly, by way of explanation. "I had to be brave enough to come for all time. Now I have decided. Rex is away; he would have been with you at the outset with all the professional sympathy in the world." Her lips trembled with anger. "Mother — when is the funeral? And where is it? May I come home to stay?"

Densie felt as if she were being flayed.

"Oh, my little girl!" she said, holding out her arms. "Mummy will try to make a home for you all — but it will be too late for Kenneth!"

XLI

During the night of Sally's return Densie and she talked, not as mother and daughter, but as two grief-stricken women. It was then Sally told the long repressed truth, the reason for listlessness and hysteria and oldness of face. For three years Rex Humberstone had found a quicker way of making a fortune than playing stocks or gambling with someone else's money. He was in the employ of the German Government. He had been organizing, investigating, spying, reporting — preparatory to America's entrance into the war. Was it any wonder she was old of heart and bitter of speech?

She had schooled herself to remain silent until America's entrance into the strife; then she had protested, only to be silenced in a well-defined, threatening manner. She had understood the reason for the sudden marriage, Rex's romantic wish to have her for his wife, his affected tenderness. A German spy is safer with an American wife, and a thousand times safer when his mother-in-law is of national importance and her name is on everyone's lips as being loyal and eager for America to win. Nothing could have suited him more! Densie, the shabby drudge, the slug had become his shield and his salvation. So he had promptly married Sally, and disillusioned her as to his motive without delay. He had counted, and rightly, on her infatuation for him to keep his secret.

So she kept silence. As Sally came to this part of the story she put her head down on her mother's lap as she used to when she was a little girl.

"Tell me everything." Densie's hand stroked the red-gold curls.

"I begged him to stop; it seemed I should go out in the street and cry out the news that my husband was in the pay of the German Government — that he was helping them with plans to burn munition factories and schoolhouses and public buildings, wreck food plants, destroy farm implements, breed cattle epidemics, poison horse feed — oh, I cannot enumerate all they planned. And in case of America's entrance into this war they would rise up and do the bidding of the Hun. And Rex was one of them, working without a breath of suspicion.

"Oh, he gave so liberally to the Red Cross, and pretended to be horrified at tales of Belgium and France — and these easy-going, good-natured people of ours believed no ill of him; nor do they of countless others within their gates. Mummy, the Americans do not realize that all about them are spies, spies, spies! Beware of every gentleman who is making his money without admitting how he does so. The shame of it — the horror — the — the living death of it!"

"Yes, Sally — yes."

"When Kenneth came to say he had enlisted I thought I should go mad unless I could tell the truth. I hardly dared look at him lest I scream out the thought that has crucified me since the day I married. Those presents Rex gave him, bought with German money; these clothes I have on, the food I eat, the roof that shelters me! I feel like a leper crying out, 'Unclean, unclean!' And he married me only to hide behind our skirts — our loyal American selves, who would never be questioned. Did the senator never suspect?"

"No, Sally; for he would have acted if he had."

"No one suspects yet — no one suspects half enough

in this country. But I shall tell them all I know. Do you wonder I screamed at Kenneth and begged him to go away — don't you understand? I saw him drowning in midocean, his transport in ruins about him and his regiment, my husband having known of the event, perhaps, in advance! Do you understand now? And when you made your patriotic speeches they only shielded a knave. For he gloried in them — oh, it's such a tangle, such a terrible tangle! And Ken is dead; but he is really dead, and living deaths are worse. Mummy, I want to see the senator and tell him the truth. It is not too late to stop the worst of what Rex could do. Then let me come home to you and be a little girl — after — after Ken comes home."

That undertaker's chapel, the formal unfeeling appointments, the atmosphere of hurried death after hurried death of him or her who had no home — only enough money to escape the potter's field. Could she bear it?

"Yes, Sally, you shall come home," she knew she said.

"I want to keep on talking, telling it over and over, of how he threatened me and laughed at me and said you were the best bodyguard in the world. He had thousands and thousands of dollars — and plans of bridges and water fronts — of Canadian bridges and —— Mummy, don't let me go mad before I have a chance to tell!"

In the morning John came to his wife and told her their boy was back. Densie had been right in her surmise. Kenneth had been sent to the guardhouse for over Sunday. Geraldine Poole had arrived Sunday morning and demanded to see him. She sent in a note begging him to "come outside just for a few moments!"

In a mad, infatuated second the boy tried to make an escape — for just a few moments — and the guard had shot at him, not intending to hit. But the bullet pierced his back and he died ten minutes later.

Geraldine, running true to form, collapsed. John had paid no further attention to her or to what she would do. By collapsing the Pooles had at least provided an escape from being present at the funeral!

Densie listened with a quiet sadness that alarmed him. She was noticing how old he looked in the morning light and how many lines had grown across his forehead and about his eyes. A new light of understanding had come to Densie. Had her son perished heroically in battle she could have borne it with a less keen anguish and a lesser degree of understanding. But this accidental, almost ignominious death, unnecessary, comically tragic, drove home the great lesson. Through Sally's confession Densie was made to see that the glory of the war was not for her, but rather the common lot. Her campaigns and speeches seemed too highly keyed and emotional beside the realities of life. Figuratively, her family turned to Densie — small and yet efficient woman of the old school, driven by modern ridicule and hastiness of censure into foreign channels — and said, "Mother, what shall we do?"

The unemployed husband, Sally, the nerve-racked feminist, the unburied boy who mutely pleaded to lie in his own home! And there was no home. Densie realized that once more she must provide a home, that a home is the veritable joy of creation. No matter what else may change or be counted out the home must be kept if wars are to be won. Without homes there can be no sustained achievement or ultimate progress. Densie had been tempted by the modern enemy of women —

the home-destroying spirit — and she had yielded. She should have withstood the enemy, weathered the difficulties, the stings of ridicule, the pricks of neglect — but kept the home. It was a sacred duty in which she had temporarily failed.

She understood now why her husband had ceased to be the buoyant handsome man and become discontented, sullen, morose. She had trespassed on his territory, driven him from it — into nowhere. That man and woman can never be equal in their abilities and duties — only love acts as the great leveler, causing them to merge into one viewpoint, a partnership of the man's and the woman's qualifications and activities. Such a wonderful thing is true marriage. That to the man is given the power of intellect and the talent of logic, and to the woman is awarded the emotional power and the duty of spiritual influence over her home and all therein. Together these grow into ideals, ideals which can best be cherished and preserved in the home. That one must be careful in this new era that destruction is not misnamed progression. To take from the old what is good, and profit by the new — but to keep the home intact through all the ages, since nothing in the divine plan has been more essential or beautiful or holy.

She also thought there should be a book written about the wives and mothers — and sometimes maiden sisters and aunts — of all successful persons; it should be on vellum and hand illumined, as enduring as the sculptor's deathless bronze. That the only art which has been denied the laurel wreath is the art of the home maker. Was it for the home maker that this verse was written: "They also serve who only stand and wait"?

That many is the denied or strangled talent quietly re-

nounced in order that the home maker's family may live according to the best in themselves. What multitudes of women whose lives have been spent in being "just mother," who have longed to express in shining glorious fashion the talent latent within themselves — and yet a good dinner and a basket of mended clothes have been their only rightful medium! Poet, painter, statesman, actor, artist — lie dormant in the hearts of these prosaic and often underestimated home makers. Yet it must be so. Civilization is not preserved by scholars' archives or senators' laws or crimson wars or even religious revivals — but by the home! In the home the scholar, statesman, soldier, ecclesiastic — learn from some woman's lips the golden rules of the world and the principles of life eternal. Except as the world can rely on the home to rejoice over their achievements, set in action their theories, celebrate their victories and weep over their sorrows there would be no scholars or statesmen or warriors or priests. As the financial magnate of a metropolis sits alone, often unknown by name to the multitude, in some dim sound-proof office of his own, while on the street men rush in mad frenzy to win or retrieve a fortune, people mob a small broker's office to demand the truth or cry or laugh as the case may warrant — so does this heart of finance, this unostentatious man, stay apart yet in direct and vital contact with the hum and happenings of commerce. Such is the relationship of the home to the activities of the world. It is far more than an emotional, sentimental place where one's weaknesses are condoned and one's virtues magnified — it is the soul of civilization. And few men have the ability to be home makers.

As Densie talked to her husband about necessary detail she felt as if she were a stranger, intruding almost,

at a time of grave personal sorrow. He answered her gently, making no moan or complaint, and tried to plan ahead so she need not be disturbed.

She knew that she told him about Sally and his face distorted into an expression of hate which she had never seen, but all he said was: "We will be glad to have our girl again, won't we, Densie?"

And then people kept trying to crowd in on her, and reporters would not be satisfied until they had peered at her, and endless sickishly scented flowers kept coming by mistake to the hotel — where they did not allow funerals.

Finally John took her to see her boy. He was ready — hateful word! She walked like an old, old woman, clinging to John's steady arm. John was of use again for a little moment; it lent him a dignity.

She knew the undertakers murmured the proper thing and that they cleared the chapel of the curious, that she might be alone. If it had been her own home she would have been alone for hours with her boy. Not all her success or cleverness or all her patriotic rallying for her country spared her the loss of her only son.

She looked down at his white handsome face, so very white and handsome — at the hands forever folded and the flag thrust through the unwilling fingers. But she did not cry. In the agony of the moment she began to plan again, plan as Kenneth would have helped her plan.

"'Out of the wreck rise I,'" Densie whispered inaudibly. She must recreate a home. It was the younger generation who clamored for the market place, and those of the past era for a home.

She realized that this anæsthesia of bland optimism must cease in America, the attitude that things are all

all right was stifling one's ears against groans or closing one's eyes to avoid sights of helpless abuse. Some things were and always have been all wrong, and others have had the record of all right down the ages, and it has seemed to the wisest of men as if the old battle between right and wrong must ever be waged. That the generation from which Densie came took the humbler attitude of Thomas á Kempis when he said, "All our knowledge is with a little darkness," and lived accordingly, whereas the present-day generation asserted, "I am the master of my fate," and proceeded to destroy, deny or defy as seemed most expedient for their aims. Who shall say which is right and which is wrong?

That the older era learned to save, to work, to endure and to pray, and the time had come when they must teach the younger generation these virtues as their share in winning the war of wars; while the younger era had learned to invent, achieve, combat, analyze — and they must share with the older generation the virtue and the glory of these things. That this war of wars called for the best of the old and the new, and the rejection of all else.

The time had come when to deny the power and menace of evil and glibly assert, "All's well with the world" was as thin and unreal as to assert there was but one dimension. That there was and is a real power of evil inasmuch as there is a power of good — else the Deity would never have permitted this war of wars. The world must align itself on the side of good, or God, or whatever name pleased, pledging to aid the Deity instead of uttering beggars' prayers for personal blessings and indulgences. The orthodox have too long treated their prayers as a series of letters to Santa Claus, overflowing with petty demands and appeals. In practical

and in spiritual ways must those who are for the cause of right sacrifice for their Creator. America's spoils in the war must be finer spoils than colonies or trade rights or indemnities — she must win the attributes for all time of justice and idealism — justice as the highest fulfillment of love, since only love can be just, and idealism, a practical demonstration of mysticism.

Then normal grief came to soften the agony of self-reproach. She clung to John as she might have done during their first married years had one of their children been taken. She seemed oblivious of all else — Sally was like a ghost slipping about.

Densie returned from the chapel and went to her room. She took the picture of Kenneth from the wall and sat dry eyed staring at it until John came and gently took it away.

The next day was the funeral, a private funeral by Densie's request, but the curious lined the way to the chapel and many cars followed without invitation to the cemetery. Densie could not remember the service, she knew someone sang and someone said the usual things, and that the casket was closed and she was told by John to stay close beside him and he would help her walk steadily. She did not even think of the senator. As she passed out she wondered for the first time if he had been there.

Returning from the burying ground Densie leaned heavily against her husband. He thought she had fainted and beckoned to Sally to come to his assistance. But she only laid her head on his shoulder to say, "You've been very brave, John."

Somehow all her thought was for John.

XLII

That same night John left to bring Harriet from New York. Densie had said he ought to rest — she or Sally would try to go.

But he insisted: "I'll go. I want to, Densie. It's my right, you know."

They were sitting in Densie's room trying not to give way to grief. Sally was beside her mother, her hands clasped tensely in her lap. Densie's black dress made her seem even more slender, and her eyes were so clear and bright that they gave warning there was to be a let up of the tension. John paced up and down listening to Densie's instructions.

"If you find Harriet too ill to travel do not leave her alone," she was saying; "stay with her at the hospital. I shall have moved from here — somewhere — I can't say now, of course. Sally and I will go together. And we must see about Rex," she added almost in an undertone. "Besides, there are other things to see to."

She meant the resignation from clubs and organizations.

"Even if she has to stay weeks in the hospital it is not right she should be without her own people." Densie rose and went to her desk to write a check. "Take this, John. It is the very least I can do for her."

Densie's secretary was moving noisily about outside. Telegrams and letters of sympathy and endless callers were still arriving in confusion. The secretary tapped at the door. John answered it.

"It is Senator Gleason," she said timidly, wondering if she had made an error in calling Densie.

John turned interrogatively to his wife.

"We will see him," she said in answer.

The senator was disappointed when John led Densie into the room.

"I am more shocked and grieved than I can express," he began simply. "The injustice, the horror of it — my poor friends!"

He, too, included John without being cognizant of the fact.

Densie sat facing him. She did not speak. John answered for her.

"Is there nothing I can do — nothing?" he urged, his gentle face lined with anxiety.

"Sally must tell you her story," Densie forced herself to say. "We must go on living, even if we long to tarry with our dead. Sally has something to ask of you."

She glanced at John and he went to call her.

The senator leaned forward eagerly. "Densie, dearest, poor little mother! How very hard for you — how cruelly unfair!"

Densie raised her hand in protest.

"I want to tell you good-by," she said mechanically. "I cannot keep our friendship — oh, I am quite myself — it is something else, something very different, that has made me change. I have let my home vanish. Do you realize my boy lay in a public chapel; my girl comes back to a hotel; Harriet is in another hotel in New York? What am I to do with these helpless ones of my own flesh and blood? I must make a home for them — just be Densie Plummer until the end of the chapter."

He started to speak but she stopped him.

"I cannot share your dreams of sunset or Indian sum-

ner or boy and girl playing; that is not for me. I have ny children and my dead boy as a reminder of my duty. And my boy loved his father. No, I shall not listen any more. Find some lonely woman who has no one of ier own to claim the first rights."

Tears came to her relief. It was good to cry, to have John and Sally coming slowly down the hall. She did not want the senator to soothe her tears, to prattle of romance; she could not have borne it. Let Sally tell him about Rex, let the statesman and patriot of him, the stranger, better side, rise to deal out justice and punishment. Densie wanted to be alone with her husband so they could mourn together over their youngest born.

After John left on the night train for New York a note came to each of the bereaved women. Densie's was from the senator. It said with characteristic sentiment:

My Dearest: You have chosen bravely, nobly. I shall never intrude again. Count me as your greatest friend; think of me if you will.

My mind is still in a daze with all Sally has told me, with the memory of your dear face, the thought of what has happened. I shall always love you, Densie Plummer — there, have I made you very angry? JIM.

Sally's was a night message from Rex. The newspapers had spread the reports of Kenneth's death — as a warning to other young and unrealizing volunteers — and he had read it in the morning paper. It was a hypocritical message of sympathy and directions to order a handsome floral piece. He would be home Tuesday.

Sally turned to her mother with outstretched arms.

"I'm afraid of him," she whispered. "Will they treat him as he deserves? Will they, mummy?"

"Of course!"

Densie banished her own thoughts — the cry of her child had come to mean more to her than the call of the people.

"There is someone who could deal with him as he deserves — but he is a long, long ways off," she sobbed.

"Is it Dean?" Densie asked tenderly.

The red-gold head nodded.

"Write Dean what has happened — Dean loved our boy. I asked your father to write him, but he has forgotten."

XLIII

The first truth that occurred to Densie when she cast about to reconstruct a home was that a home can be nothing but sincere — as the human eye unconsciously sees its best without being goaded to do so — and that the sincerity of the home was the hidden influence pervading it and making it so precious. Apartments and hotels are not dominated by similar influences. She smiled as she recalled the days when she so envied the purported life of ease.

She had set to work as bravely to rebuild as she had to destroy. For there was Harriet to be brought back; and Sally, who was liable to collapse after Rex's arrest; and her own tired, faithful John, who must find his grip again. It was no time to waste in selfish indolence or retrospection. She grieved as she worked with bleeding memories of the boy Kenneth as he had trotted after her during that first moving, the disappointment when he could not keep the forlorn puppy, the evenings they had spent together. Oh, she had had many wonderful years of her boy's life, she must try to think only of that.

Not even when word came that the Pooles were leaving town, a hasty retreat from Mrs. Densie Plummer's territory, because of the guilt and shame which their addlebrained daughter had brought upon them, did Densie halt in her plans to brood over the past.

Sally stayed in seclusion in the hotel waiting for word from the senator as to what had happened. That something was happening was evident from the silence; so Sally waited, wondering as to the outcome. Rex had so

impregnated her with a sense of his power and ability that she sometimes wondered if he would not conquer his enemies as he had conquered her.

Only it was a relief to have told mummy and to have her be kindly and gentle instead of rushing off here and there, preoccupied and irritated if aught crossed her pathway. It was a relief to let grief run its course and not to plan for the future — to know that mummy was taking care of that.

She did not know Densie had resigned from her public interests and to a delegation of protesting citizens she had said quietly: "My family needs a home, and a home must have a home maker and keeper, one whose first and last interests and devotions are given to its welfare. There can be no halfway. As the stone-age man left his woman beside the cave to keep the fires aglow and thus ward off wild beasts, so the man of to-day and the woman of business — for there must be women solely of careers and business in to-day's scheme of things — must leave in their dwelling some woman's woman who will keep the fires aglow and ward off modern but equally wild beasts!"

To which she would hear no argument. Puzzled yet admiring they went away wondering if grief had driven her to this extreme stand and if after a little she would not relent and prepare again to enter public life.

But Densie dismissed them from her mind as she used to dismiss her family, once outside their doorway. She had a great and wonderful task, mellowed by memory, inspired by grief and rejuvenated by love. She set about to find a home, for she wanted Sally to leave the hotel as soon as possible. Densie was not hypnotized by Rex Humberstone; she knew the fate awaiting him. And she could not bear another hotel tragedy. She

must have a place for Harriet, a quiet, lovely old place instead of a hospital with its buzz of bells and odor of anæsthetics.

And John — Densie smiled like a girl. John must come into his own.

So Densie hunted for a house outside the city limits, for the Little House on the Hill was infested by foreigners who believed in a generous allowance of boarders. She declined modern bungalows, hastily constructed Queen Anne cottages with scraps of lawns and back yards only adequate for the washerwoman. Besides, the income of the Plummer family had temporarily halted. But Densie did not let herself consider this. First let her find a house and move her family into it — then the income would take care of itself.

The fourth day of hunting brought her to a shabby white house with possibilities. It had large high-ceilinged rooms with fireplaces in most of them, and a square entrance hall — the sort that needed a fur rug and a painting of an ancestor, a carved walnut table with an old blue bowl crowded with pink roses and white lilacs, and where, upon entering, one would smell the baking of fresh bread such as Ellen Porch's had been or of roasting meat, and where one would see hats and coats and sweaters in profusion on the clothes tree. Densie foresaw all this in her imagination as she stood in the empty, dirty doorway and listened to the agent's glib protestations as to its merits.

The bedrooms were deserving of their name — north and south chambers would suit them well — and if the walls were tinted with glowing shades and rosy chintz-covered chairs and tables were put in, Densie could see Harriet, tired of mind and starved of heart, lie in a comfortable bed, no lumpy hotel affair, and watch the

logs crackle in her fireplace, and look outside to the sky for fresh inspiration. She would have Sally's room opposite her sister's; these two must come together in spirit as they had never done before. She would tint Sally's a tender blue shade with turquoise hangings of cretonne and old-fashioned pictures hung about — Sally liked pictures but they would have disturbed Harriet. She would place a workstand in Sally's room and relentlessly pile it with unmended stockings. She must teach her big-little girls to do their proper tasks. It was like making grown ups play properly in a nursery. Densie passed out of Sally's intended room to view the large front room with its old-style alcove which should be hers and John's. She would make this room yellow, the color John had long ago preferred — with blackeyed Susans in the pattern of the hangings if possible, and sunshiny braided rugs on the floors. In the alcove should be the table with its plate of apples and knife, the books he loved best, his slippers and dressing jacket; and Densie would sit across from him after "the children" were in bed, to say, "Well, John, what is the news to-day?"

How good it seemed — how worth while. The same glow of proud determination which she experienced when she was about to campaign the state for a gigantic enterprise was hers as she signed the lease for the old white house. She lingered downstairs to view the front and back parlors — and a long side room — a "study," the agent said it was designated. Densie did not assign any use to this room. It was quite enough to furnish the parlors mentally, into one vast yet cosy living room, booky and just disorderly enough to make one feel the right to use every sofa pillow or to sit in every chair. The dining room and kitchen were dreary and cob-

webby from their long idleness. But Densie scarcely noticed that. She realized the defects of the place, the broken window panes, the loose shutters, the unattended lawn, the dislodged chimney bricks. The agent would have been surprised could he have seen the house as Densie visualized it — a lovely old home, newly painted, with smoke curling in hospitable invitation from the tall chimneys, the lawn as velvety as The Evergreens' had once been, and a war garden planted on the uncared-for land. There was a dismal chicken house, and a tiny stable — but that would be John's domain. She must leave something for him to do.

She went back to the hotel to tell Sally.

"It's going to be our home. Aren't you glad? Don't you feel stifled in here? I want to pack our bags and leave at once."

Sally shook her head. "I suppose I ought to. Only I don't feel, mummy — that's the trouble. I'm just a person who eats and sleeps and breathes at proper intervals — all the brain and heart of me is afraid to feel. It's Rex — it's what is going to happen!"

Densie took off her hat and coat.

"We cannot foresee what will happen, only that he shall never bother you again!"

She picked up a letter, which was waiting for her from John. It was brief and she was disappointed to find no tender message for herself, though she had no right to expect one.

Dear Densie: Harriet is in a sanitarium on —— Street. She seems in bad condition. We hope to come home in three weeks or a month. Love, JOHN.

Three weeks or a month! She must work wonders in that time — but what a glorious task she had set

herself. She began planning how much the sale of the present furniture would bring, for she would have none of it in the new house. She wanted sensible modern things — Densie was not so visionary that she could not see the value of a vacuum cleaner and electricity, plain furniture with none of the dust-catching carvings of the old style, wicker things of simple line and comfort.

Coming in that same night, after long sessions with painters, electricians, furniture men and scrubwomen, Densie found Sally waiting for her eagerly.

"It is ended," she said, coming to lay her head on Densie's shoulder. "It was done quietly. They took Rex, but he killed himself rather than face the consequences. I might have known that he would."

She held out the senator's letter corroborating what she had said. They were holding the body until Sally gave instructions.

"Well?"

Densie wondered if the old infatuation would demand a sentimental mourning over a traitor's body as its last toll.

"I never wish to hear his name again," she answered without hesitation. "I have wired them to that effect."

Densie kissed her.

"Come, you and father and Harriet and I shall be brave and work and drive away neurotic grief and memories. You and I must settle our new home, Sally. Won't that be wonderful? And then we must work and we must save. Our country has never needed men and women, individually and collectively, to save and conserve without hesitation and without constant urging, as much as it does now. No one of us but what can do his part."

Sally drew away. It was a shock, this brisk, practical

manner of speaking, following on the heels of Rex's suicide. Sally had become used to lying in bed and making a feeble little wail to her feeble little conception of God that her life was wrecked — she wanted to remain passive and injured, hiding indefinitely from the sunlight and her fellow creatures. But Densie would not have it so. She would force her into the sunlight to bring her to her senses.

XLIV

A month later, while the state still talked of Mrs. Densie Plummer's remarkable change of residence and withdrawal from public affairs, Sally and her mother sat, one at the bottom of the broad front stairs and one at the top, both engulfed in checked-gingham aprons.

"I think I shall sleep to-night," Sally said, glancing up to the top of the stairs at her small but imperious mummy. "Every bone of me aches — and look at all there is to be done!"

"But it's fine that there are things to be done and that we can do them."

Densie's voice quivered; all during the day's tasks of superintending, planning, working — she had been thinking of where she had best hang Kenneth's picture. Should she selfishly keep it for her own room or place it between the windows of the living room where all could share alike?

"Well, if I do say so — we've done a jolly lot."

Sally looked about in pleased contemplation.

"Sh-h, don't waste another daylight moment. We only have two more days to finish it up."

Densie sprang up briskly and ran down the stairs.

"How can you? Why, mummy, an hour's work tires me all out."

"Because you've never gotten into the way of doing things," her mother told her. "At my age I'm able to do twice as much as you."

"What in the world is the matter with this modern

way of living? We're not taught rightly or else we won't be taught or something tangles us up."

"I think"— Densie gravely pointed the tack hammer at her daughter —"that the great error in this age is to have us learn the exceptions first and the rules afterward. That is why, at thirty-one, Sally, you cannot mop a floor without having a backache; and why the preparation of a simple meal covers you with confusion — and the house with burning and strange odors!"

Two days later a cab stopped before the new-old house, still glistening with fresh paint, with a repaired pathway in winding invitation to come up the steps and find the polished brass knocker. The knocker had been almost the last thing Densie had done, the house needed just such a lion's head with the heavy ring between its jaws.

Crisp dotted curtains were at the shining window panes and smoke curled from the chimney just as she had planned. Outside an old man raked up the leaves and sticks, mowing the tall grass with a huge cutter. John found himself so interested in the procedure that he forgot to gather all the cushions until Harriet feebly reminded him of it.

They came up the walk slowly, the oldish woman, so thin and unsteady, and the tired-faced man. Densie and Sally flung open the door in welcome. The odor of fresh bread and tea roses — saintly combination — pervaded the hall. The sunset cast a kindly glow on their faces, but it did not deceive Densie.

"Oh, my dears!" she said, holding out her arms while Sally bustled about with the wraps.

Harriet sank down on the nearest chair.

"Please let me go to bed. But isn't it nice here? So very homey."

At which Densie was satisfied.

"I leave Sally to take charge of you, Harriet. We'll send supper up presently. I must see to things below. John, will you look at the Little House or will you go upstairs first?"

She was as nervous as a bride as she waited for his answer, fingering the bows of her white apron and trying not to laugh and cry all at once.

"I'll see the Little House. You don't mean to say you've been baking? Well, well!" His voice was fairly eager.

She nodded and led the way while Sally and Harriet slowly toiled up the stairs. It was all simple — Densie's purse did not allow of extravagances as it once had. Plain harmonious rugs and hangings of wood brown and dull green, sturdy furniture and vases of flowers here and there, a little piano with song books once more astride the rack. Between the windows of the living room Densie paused, slipping her arm through John's. In understanding silence they looked up at the picture of their boy as they had last known him, in his uniform, young and very, very much in earnest and filled with promise. The eyes were not looking down at them, but out at the worlds he was prepared to conquer.

Finally John said, "Did he make you do all this — this miracle?"

She nodded. "We've a home again. It may help just a little."

Then she led him all about the rooms. There were touches here and there of the sacred past which made his fingers press her tenderly or made him give some brief, deeply felt comment which more than rewarded her efforts.

"You've not lost the art — not after all these years."

He put his arms round her. She was hungry to have him draw her close and kiss her again.

"I thought I wanted to lose the art, but now I see the mistake of such a wish, the gradual growth of a misunderstanding. We were all to blame. Only I as the mother had no right to destroy something unless I had something of equal merit to take its place. There is nothing which takes the place of a home, is there, John? At this time of stress our country needs to guard the home even as it guards the coast line. Without our homes our nation has no foundation, nothing for which to fight. We modern women have tried to make the world institutional, that we be relieved of the pettiness of detail, the blessedness of drudgery — but it must not be done. Look at our girls upstairs! Our boy, perhaps, had he had a home — well, things might not have happened as they did."

It was Densie's turn to break down and John's to comfort.

"Ah, but it was I who was wrong," he admitted. "I shirked first of all — I did not appreciate, I became so accustomed to comfort and sacrifice. I see the thing now as if it had happened to some other couple besides you and me. I think it often does happen, don't you? But I was wrong ——"

"It often takes courage to say 'I am right,'" she said, looking up with very violety eyes, "but it requires divine humility to say 'I was wrong.' Kiss me, John, and bless our home — we will keep it now until we are too old to know the difference between our home — and someone else's. I feel as if I had built a fortress about our grown-up children — as if I could fight all the world before they would be perverted in their viewpoints again."

"Harriet is quite ill," John said gently as they went into the kitchen. "The doctor says it is brain fag — a new interest or set of interests might cure her. I wondered all the way on the train what sort of new house you would have for us, Densie — some awful, modern establishment where one's only intimate friend is the dumb-waiter. I did not speak of this to Harriet; in fact I scarcely spoke to her at all. She wants to be let alone and she cries if you ask her questions."

Densie nodded wisely.

"I'll make broths that will give her spirit and custards that will make her talk in order to beg for more — and she shall have new interests. John Plummer, I, Densie, do solemnly vow that my daughters shall learn to keep house until they are self-sufficient. They are both within our power again." She laughed a little sadly. "Three grown women and one small house — no need of taking a girl from a munitions factory to come and half cook our meals. You shall be Lord Mayor of the Barnyard — that I leave in your hands."

"What a jolly old kitchen! It reminds me of Aunt Sally's very own. Remember how we had cocoa and toast Sunday nights for tea? The greatest treat of the week was to eat in the kitchen! What an oven!"

"What a turkey it can roast — we're going to have a real home Christmas," Densie said gaily as she went about preparing Harriet's tray.

She remembered the last few Christmases, with Sally and Rex exchanging loveless handsome gifts for show, Kenneth off for a dance, Harriet writing home briefly, and John aimlessly wandering into a movie for the evening. As for herself, her day had been crowded with floral offerings and visits to orphanages to distribute

mittens and a pygmy orange apiece, and end by a club banquet at which she was called upon for the most important speech. No, there should never again be such holidays.

"Why, Densie," John was calling to her, "here's a woodshed!"

"Certainly! Where would our logs be kept?"

She added a spotless napkin for the tray, and then rang the bell, signal for Sally.

Sally came rushing down. "Harriet doesn't want any supper. She is crying, and I can't get her to do anything."

Sally had forgotten her own woes.

Densie shouldered the tray.

"See that the meat doesn't burn," she warned as she marched out of the door.

She found Harriet in a disconsolate little heap, weeping silently and refusing to answer.

"I know you are weak and tired and confused," Densie said patiently, "but so could we all be. Rex has committed suicide — he was a German spy — and yet Sally has managed to keep about and be brave."

Harriet started up. "Mummy, how terrible! Why didn't you tell me? Oh, poor Sally? What a disgrace!"

"No; a merciful removal. Rex had been in the employ of the Huns for three years. Can you fancy that? All his money came from our enemy. Sally knew it, was afraid to speak out — fears and infatuation kept her silent. There, sit here, Harriet. Here's a nice pillow for your back — and as you drink your broth I'll tell you just how Sally came to tell me."

Deftly Densie managed the change. Harriet, her

dark eyes twice their natural size, obeyed like a child, eager for the news. It had given her something else to think about.

"Why, I didn't know Sally could be so game. She was as cheerful as a bird — it made me terribly nervous — but I can't help but admire the way she acted."

"Well, Sally has washed all the woodwork in this house and helped me buy and put away every pan and dish, and she settled your room and her own and did any number of odd jobs, such as persuading the painter that speed was advisable and flattering the electrician into finishing his contract. Sally hasn't had any time to favor her nerves."

Harriet drained her cup. "How good that is! It is like the barley broth you made for us when we had sore throats and it hurt to swallow. It hurts to swallow now — but the lump is from unshed tears, I think."

She was surprised and ashamed at herself for the confession.

Densie passed her the custard.

"Then, too, we have much to plan ahead. Your father has no work; neither have you. You cannot go back to New York for a year, as you well know. Don't worry, Harriet, it will be all right — only we must plan. Here is Sally to consider too. And so we have done a lot of thinking while we scrubbed and dusted and bought and arranged — and that is the finest, most efficient way in the world to think and plan — to work as you do so."

"But what will you do, mummy? About your work and your clubs?"

"I have resigned. I must look after my family again. Now finish that up like a good child and go to sleep.

I'll tuck you into bed. Isn't the fire pretty? It is good to have a wood fire again, isn't it?"

"Is there a furnace?" Harriet asked rather unappreciatively.

"Yes, but logs give a special joy all their own. Now then — into bed you go, just as if I were a trained nurse. I warrant you never gave them battle. I must go below and see to our dinner. Are you all right? Good night, my dear."

And without asking she stooped to kiss the pale tired forehead.

She hurried off lest Harriet catch sight of her own tears. It seemed so cruel and so unreal that this was Harriet — this wreck of nerves and mass of phobias and indifference to everything save her own morbid fears.

Below, Sally and her father were conducting the ceremonies as best they could, but making clumsy work of it. Densie set them to rights. It was easy to remember Aunt Sally's teachings, to step back so many years to when she was fresh from her training as to how to get a meal the quickest and daintiest way.

When they sat at the table Densie lifted her small hand in interruption of the carving. She bowed her head and said swiftly: "We thank Thee, O Lord, for this food. Praise and bless it to our use."

Late that night — with Sally fast asleep dreaming of dishwashing and the strange new home, her own blue room, and Harriet across the way, and of Dean Laddbarry's coming to her and saying, "Sally, he is dead, he is dead." Densie lingered downstairs after John had gone to his room.

There were a few of the little fussy things to do, the same indefinable tasks that had once irritated everyone. She did them gladly now, thinking — because John had

suggested it by saying his glasses needed changing — that as old age was far-sighted in the physical sense it was because old age was one of retrospection and summarizing, away from the thick of things, whereas youth was near-sighted, in the heat of the fray and undependable as to its deduction. Hence the old and much protested against advice, "Heed your elders!"

The autumn wind had risen to howl about the house and impress those within with a sense of warmth and security. Densie listened to it with a defiant joy. She did not care how loud it whistled, how cold the night — once more she had her family underneath her own roof.

John had properly banked the furnace. She looked about to see if there were any other odd chores. She was quite tired — but with a blessed tiredness of both body and mind, which made her sleep without dreams and waken refreshed.

She fancied she heard a scratching at the door — it might have been the wind. But she opened it to verify her idea. On the doorstep crouched a half-grown nondescript dog — mostly just dog, as Kenneth used to say — his eyes peering eagerly into the warm lighted hall.

Unconsciously Densie opened the door wider that he might creep in. He lay submissively on the hall mat, not knowing whether a blow was to be his reward. He had come a long ways — and was unwelcomed, judging from the gaunt ribs and quivering body, the muddied paws, one of which was wounded, and the bedraggled coat of black. He looked at Densie in mute supplication.

"Don't you need me?" he seemed to ask. "You can't have a home without a real dog — like your boy used to tell you! I'm nobody, but I've possibilities too.

Try me — for his sake. I'll frighten off tramps and I'll not chew up master's gloves or bark when Miss Harriet is napping. I'll amuse Miss Sally — if she were awake she'd speak a good word for me. I'm nobody, but like the rest of us forlornities I'd be quite a person if I only had a home!"

He whined, dragging himself over to her feet.

Densie was thinking of the day Kenneth brought in the puppy and begged, "He's nobody, he was just born in Skinner's back yard — but if I don't keep him he'll be drowned!"

He seemed to say, "I escaped drowning twice — I've been stoned and chased and beaten — I've better blood in me than you think. Let me prove it. I ran away from the crowded streets to find a home."

Densie knelt and patted the black head. "We'll call you Captain," she said. "Come get your supper!"

XLV

Harriet followed her mother about the house as if she were a guest who was trying to be polite in not interfering with routine duties and yet not lose a moment's opportunity to visit. She watched the brisk methods of cleaning this or that with admiring eyes.

"You have not lost the art, have you?" she asked when they finally rested in the living room, Densie knitting a huge gray soldier sock.

Outside, the clear November sun — Indian summer, Densie remembered with a twinge of regret — shone on Sally's bare head as she and her father walked about the place pointing out where next summer's garden would be planted and where was the best spot for flowers. Captain tagged after them, his stump of a tail wagging whenever they paused and his muzzle pushing itself into Sally's hand to remind her of his presence.

"I presume one never loses anything that has been really learned."

Densie beheld proudly the change the few weeks had wrought in her eldest child. The face had softened; it was not robust as yet, but the eyes really smiled as well as the lips, and there was a gentle note in Harriet's abrupt voice. The wrapper of lavender wool suited her well, she did not seem the former Harriet Plummer, chief statistician of a social-service bureau.

"Yes, I'm afraid you do," she told her mother. "I'm afraid I've lost the good of everything I ever learned or investigated. I can never go back to doing the same sort of work. When I try to school myself to

the idea I begin to feel weak and trembly and I want to cry. What a waste it has been, mummy, hasn't it? All the years of being away from home!"

"Perhaps it has not been wasted; reserve your decision. The same ability may not appear in the same form, but it has not vanished forever. There is other work besides the work of a machine. You kept that brain of yours overworked and you starved your heart — the combination can never be successful. Your nerves were called upon to pay the price."

Harriet looked about the living room.

"It's so good to have a home. I thought once I despised a home — that was when I was so young that I must have been impossible. But now I never want to leave one. It is the mutton barley broth, perhaps"— she tried to speak lightly —"and the custards — and the seeing you renounce everything for which you had worked, and just become our mother."

Densie glanced up at Kenneth's picture. Harriet did not notice.

"Tell me, mummy, was it hard to do?"

"Hard things are good for us," Densie evaded, dropping her knitting. "If I had not had the experience of home making I could never have had the success of a career. It was the rugged, endless tasks confronting me in my home that made me able to cope with outside duties. But I was wrong, quite wrong."

"It seems wonderful to waken in the morning"— Harriet was too preoccupied with her own transformation to notice minutely what had been her mother's — "to watch the trees sway outside — not the courtyard of a hotel with lonesome gray flakes of soot drifting down; to have a log fire all one's own. Is there anything more heavenly than the smell of burning pine

boughs? And to have one's own blankets and furniture — and everything."

She laughed at her own incoherence. "To have one's house and no one come within it save those asked; to watch Sally be as gay at heart as she ever was; and father ——"

She hesitated, but Densie helped her on. "Father must find his grip again; we shall not worry about that."

"He's like the father of long ago — of croquet and fishing-party days. He's young again."

"It's the cooking," Densie laughed.

"But what am I to do? I'm a sort of educated driftwood person. I can't do anything but the work for which I've been trained. I can't seem to think of anything I can do. I'm not domestic, mummy. Sally is; but I want to do something that is going to help."

Densie was silent; she was studying Harriet's face, but whatever she thought she kept to herself.

"I was thinking this morning," Harriet finished with characteristic honesty, "that Saint Theresa was quite right when she said, 'Nervousness is largely selfishness.'"

The postman interrupted their conversation. Densie came back from the rustic letter box with a confused expression. She sent Harriet out in the back yard to find her father and sister and tell them to plan for twice as large an asparagus bed as they had said they intended.

Left alone she opened the letter addressed to her and laid Sally's mail aside without glancing at it. It was Indian summer — and the senator had dared to write once more. It was hard to believe that Densie had so valiantly relinquished the worlds she had conquered, had returned to her own hearth and her three broken reeds. Wonderful and praiseworthy as it was — did she feel

content? Was she quite sure she was happy? It was Indian summer — and he was very lonesome. There could never be any other old-fashioned fairy save Densie Plummer.

Densie hurriedly drew out some notepaper, and regardless of her approaching family and her various stewpans bubbling away at a warning gait she answered:

"Harriet has just now told me that she believes with Saint Theresa that nervousness is very largely selfishness. I cannot help but wonder, my dear, if loneliness is not synonymous, too? Forgive me if that hurts. But your life is so unhampered by ties, free to attempt the idealistic reforms of which we talked — was it a hundred years ago? — that you have no right to go seeking maudlin schoolboy happiness. It is not meant to be. Such men and women as yourself, who have no ties, no material want, a mind and heart attune with God — such as you are those who are meant to have careers. Who was it said, 'He who climbs high must climb alone'?

"If you could see us in the new home — the change in Harriet since she has learned that each task is everyone's task in a measure and that the world cannot be institutional; Sally learning to cook and bake and laugh at the same time; and John his old self again; our boy's picture like a guardian angel in our living room — oh, James Gleason, you would be ashamed to think you have dared tempt me!

"I expect great things of you during your Indian summer — not a time of romance and personal solace, but of great tasks accomplished for our nation. Do not fail me. Take the love you offered me and give it to our cause — and you will find that Indian summer will be everlasting. DENSIE PLUMMER."

She had scarcely sealed the note when the family descended upon her, Captain coming to lie at her feet in abject worship.

"Well, girls," John had said as they were about to

come into the house, "shall we go in to mother?"

To which they agreed as they used to in the years when Densie was still a personage and had not become the faulty individual her family tried to convince her that she was. John had taken their arms and they had strolled in together, chatting about next year's war garden and the fact that Captain certainly had good blood in him or he would not have heeled John without teaching, and a root of honeysuckle could become a thing of joy and beauty if planted near the front doorway, and if they had an ice-cream freezer they could give a party. "Like we used to have, daddy," Sally said, squeezing his arm in affection.

"Well, my young Americans," Densie questioned as they came in, "what ahoy?"

"We've planned the garden. Come and see."

"Here's a letter, Sally." She handed over the envelope. "I'll take a turn about the 'estate,' and then I must see to dinner."

"I'll run upstairs to tidy my room," Sally excused herself.

She bounded up the stairs and reached her room, carefully closing the door. The letter was from Dean Laddbarry. Her heart beat quickly as it one time used to beat for Rex Humberstone in those first mad days.

It was a long jolly letter, with only a brief paragraph to sympathize with her for what had happened, but that better things must be in store. He was head over heels into work with the alfalfa crop, hardly knew which way to turn. The business was doubling itself in no time and they wanted to start an Eastern branch. He might drop round at Christmas time — if Sally didn't mind. He had sent the letter in care of Densie's former hotel address and if she was not there he was sure it would

be forwarded. Everyone knew Mrs. Densie Plummer! He felt a lot of things he could not write — about Ken, about everything. Would she drop a line and say if she would be at home round Christmas time?

Harriet found her sister sitting in the dusk, the letter in her lap, looking out at the tossing tree limbs and listening to the wind play weird melodies.

"What in the world, Sally ——" she began with a trace of the old irritable non-understanding.

Sally started up. "I'm sorry. I meant to come down long ago."

"We thought you must be housecleaning." Harriet turned on the light. "Why — you've been crying." Her voice softened. "What was it, Sally?"

She stood away from her sister, as awkward as a man who has no right to caress.

"Only my silliness as usual. I've been thinking what a lot of years I've wasted — and now it is too late."

"What is too late?" Harriet glanced shrewdly at the letter. "Oh — is that from Dean Laddbarry?"

"How did you know?" Sally retorted sharply.

"Oh, I'm not all sticks and stones, even if I cannot be a rosy creature of romance. Perhaps I've wasted years too."

It was the first admission Harriet had ever made to her sister. Sally rose and came to kiss her impulsively.

"Harriet, we'll never desert mummy again, will we?"

"Never — nor worry her."

"What a long time it has taken to realize values!"

"But what a long time we still have to realize them," Harriet comforted.

"What will you do with yourself, Harriet, after you are quite strong? Go back to New York?"

"I don't know, Sally; I want to be useful and be at home — that's about all."

"Which is enough."

"What will you do?" Harriet retaliated.

Sally blushed. "I — don't — know," she hesitated.

Harriet gave her a little shake. "I don't believe you," she said.

The next morning John and Harriet went to the city with a shopping list and Sally and Densie were left to put the house to rights.

"Was your letter from Dean?" asked Densie when she felt the opportune moment had approached.

Sally nodded and fell to redusting the shiny table top.

"What did he say?"

"Sent his love — and he might be in town Christmas time on business. He sent the letter to your hotel so it was delayed. He had heard about Rex."

Sally stopped dusting and stared down at the floor.

"Look up at me — so." Densie tilted her daughter's chin between her small fingers. "Ah — I think I understand. Please tell Dean to take Christmas dinner with us. It is to be a family dinner — and he is welcome."

Sally caught her mother in her arms. "Waltz with me, waltz with me!" she cried, dragging the small rejoicing mummy about the room until they stood before Kenneth's picture. Then Sally released her hold.

"If Ken were only here," she said softly.

"Who can say he is not?" Densie answered slowly.

A week later Harriet came into her mother's room with a strangely sheepish expression. She had returned from walking, her hands filled with glowing ivy leaves and a spray of late fall blossoms.

"What now, my dear?" Densie asked. "You look very radiant. I'm quite proud of my sanitarium."

Harriet bowed her thanks. There was something of the boy about Harriet — or rather a sexless elfish sprite even though the gray did creep noticeably into her black hair. She threw off her wraps and came over to Densie, looking at her mother in approval. Densie no longer used an eye pencil or rouge and her face had the pinkish blush of middle age, middle age which has not spared itself. The brown-gray hair was gathered in a simple knot and her eyes were so violety that no novelist could have resisted them. They deepened as she watched her daughter. Her frock, a gray mull with black velvet bows, completed the picture.

"What a dear you are!" she said impulsively.

Densie was so pleased that she blushed as much of a blush as if the senator had spoken.

"Well — what now?"

"I've come to believe that often the individual can accomplish more than the organization. Mummy, have you any particular use for the long room, the erstwhile study, you said it was? There's nothing but packing boxes in it now, is there?"

"Yes — what are you going to start? A woman's reformatory?"

Harriet stammered in her confession.

"It — it sounds stupid perhaps — it would have sounded stupid to my nervous, selfish old self — but I've been walking a good deal near the railroad districts ——"

"And I pictured you in the woods! Why the railroad?"

"There are so many children," she continued soberly. "I don't know just how it started — some of them were

fighting one day and I waited to see how it would end. Then I talked to them — and they listened. And I gave the one with a bleeding nose my handkerchief. I have never been friends with children — but all at once I began to want to be. Then Captain helped; he made friends with them and the youngsters used to beg to see him do his tricks. And they would ask me questions — about everything under the sun — and I'd have to hurry to think up the right answers. And as I talked to them I saw how thin and malnourished of mind and body they were — and how helpless! It was their helplessness that made me want to aid them. Unless someone would stretch out a hand they would never have anything in their child lives but blows for kisses and curses for kind words. And so I began telling stories. I was as shy about it as any bride cooking her first meal. But they liked it — and I told myself that all my training must not be wasted. Everyone must love someone, mummy — isn't that right?"

Densie nodded.

"The next day after I began stories I taught them a song, their poor harsh little voices tried hard to carry the tune. So they began to watch for me every day, and I've never disappointed them even when it rained. And they came in the rain and I thought of how happy they would be safe inside some warm house and of the side room and what a splendid little place it would be for them. I would have little lectures and teach the girls to sew and the boys to knit and carve wood. Only on Saturdays and Sundays, mummy — and there's a separate entrance so they would not bother you. I do want the children — would you mind?"

"Mind? Go downstairs and see how much work must be done to get the room ready. It is furnace heated,"

Densie added with her ever-ready practicality. "Harriet, you're cruel."

"It was deciding to be a very pale blue-stocking," Harriet laughed, "that did it. And you've no idea how nteresting children are!" She was unconscious of her wn enthusiasm. "There is one little girl as beautiful s a Madonna, and a boy who wants to go to college, nd a lame child who needs a crutch, and two others with rossed eyes that could easily be cured. Mummy, do you emember when Sally said it was fun just to be alive? Well, she was right!"

XLVI

Dean Laddbarry waited for Densie to break the silence and Densie waited for Dean Laddbarry to express his opinion. They looked at each other like mischievous children who had somehow evolved a sudden and rather unexpected success.

"Tired, Madame Plummer?" Dean asked as he watched the flush in her cheeks deepen.

"Nice sort of tired. How are you?" Densie was knitting swiftly on her war sock. "What makes you idle on a Wednesday morning? I didn't think you'd want to stay in to talk to an old lady!"

"Don't you know that the day after Christmas is always nicer than the holiday itself? The warmed-up turkey dinner is always more delectable, the Christmas tree a trifle more familiar — it has lost that first impressive stateliness and you don't mind attacking the centerpiece of fruit and raisins, which on Christmas Day you felt bound to regard with awe and lack of desire. Besides, it's snowing, and I've a hope-to-die living room and open fire and the nicest young-old person to talk to and ask advice. It's jolly to loll back among cushions and watch the snow crowd in vain against the windows and look at — oh, see for yourself."

He waved his hand vaguely.

Densie looked. She saw the Christmas tree, so tall that John had had to cut off the top branches in order to get it in the standard, white with cotton-wool snow and glistening with tinsel with a young and laughing Santa Claus perched on the top, and foolish inexpensive trifles

— for this was a war Christmas — scattered beneath the boughs.

Harriet's children had come yesterday afternoon after dinner to rifle the tree of goodies and mittens and mufflers and an absolutely unessential bit of foolishness for each which was contributed by Dean Laddbarry, the Santa Claus Lochinvar out of the West, who had dropped in two days before Christmas expecting to find a preoccupied and socially rushed Plummer family and who had been led into Densie's kitchen, which was fairly bursting with the forthcoming menu, and had been set to stoning raisins and picking out walnut meats.

Dean had scarcely had time to collect himself and rearrange his mental picture of the Plummers. Having left them á la carte, so to speak, it was rather a stunner to return and find them in a rejuvenated Little House conducted on the good old American plan.

Bits of red ribbon, stumps of bayberry candles, boxes with holly wreaths and tissue paper were still piled in disorder on the chairs and tables. A book of carols was on the piano rack. Harriet had taught her ragged urchins to gather about while Sally played the old Mahogany Tree and they sang it shrilly.

Kenneth's picture was framed in evergreen and a vase of white flowers placed underneath and his baby picture was twined with holly and placed on the desk.

She saw Captain sleeping happily before the wood fire, dreaming of the flock of turkey bones flying in his direction. The clock ticked peaceably and the sun shone through the fluted white curtains and made known to this erstwhile boy of Densie's that Sally's hands had dusted the rooms as carefully as her great-aunt would have done.

Without, John Plummer was cutting wood — it was his

delight, he protested, to chop the logs as he had done when a boy. It limbered him, he insisted, when Densie would have interfered. Harriet and Sally had gone with baskets to various mothers and grandmothers of Harriet's children who had been without Christmas cheer.

They had asked Dean to squire them about, but with unusual lack of interest he declined, saying he wanted to talk to Densie and his time was limited.

"What made you?" the big honest-eyed man demanded suddenly. "Whatever in the world caused such a miracle?"

Densie dropped her knitting. "Does it seem so to you? I thought I was the only one who overestimated what has happened."

"A miracle!" he repeated stanchly.

"Why, when I saw you last ——"

He paused, bringing to mind the fashionably dressed, hurried woman, preoccupied with the world's needs and her own advancement; the eccentric, impersonal Harriet; John mistaking the shadow for the substance; and Sally with her tired dead eyes.

Densie pointed to the picture of her son.

"His death. I had no home to bring him to — that taught me, Dean. I saw it then as I could never have seen it otherwise. I lost no time in trying to right the wrong. Dean, if American women of to-day who feel that homes are irksome and duties are nightmares, if they could know the agony that destroying a home will bring them! Nothing takes the place of home — nothing!"

He nodded.

"And we go to church. Not that we only believe all we hear from the pulpit, for most of us believe far more. So does he who stands in the pulpit if he could speak without censure. We go because church attendance is a thing

interwoven with home, because every right thinking and living person, particularly at this time, should lend his presence to some spiritual creed and give tangible proof thereof that this is so. We have no right to call ourselves 'above' going to church or 'too far advanced' or 'It is not necessary; I say my own prayers in my own way.' It is as much of a duty as to rise when our national hymn is played or to salute the flag physically, evidence of the mental feeling the sight of it inspires. It has done us good to come once more into a family pew and listen reverently to the words of a man of God."

"You are right — if more persons went to church and fewer spent their time explaining why they did not need to go, this world would be a saner place."

"It is like those who explain why homes are not necessary — what do they give us, these reformers, after they have shattered our faith and blotted out our customs? Nothing! And that is not even an attempted honest exchange."

"You have gathered them back safely," he said.

"All but my boy!"

After another silence Dean rose and tiptoed over to her, putting his great tanned hand on her shoulder.

"Let me be your boy," he begged. "I've always wanted to call you mother. I lost mine before I could remember her; and a chap never has but one. You've lost your boy. I love your Sally. Won't you let me call you mother?"

Densie's hand reached up to pat his.

"You still love her?" she asked.

"I shall always love her. Do you think it is too late?"

"Have you told her?"

"She knows without my telling; she has always known.

I did not speak of it openly before the holiday for fear I might have marred it."

"Then ask her, Dean ——"

"And if she is willing?"

"My son!"

Densie turned to kiss the broad, lined forehead. After which she gave way to a very feminine and proper little cry with Dean holding her tenderly — and imagining it was Sally.

"This will never do," Densie admitted as Captain, roused by the commotion, came wagging over, bent on investigation. "Suppose John found me crying! He would think I was longing for the old sort of living — I'd never be able to convince him. Dean, go sit there and tell me about Indians or tarantulas or something quite outside my realm."

"I want to tell you about business," he added quickly; "and if Father Plummer comes in I'll know he's been eavesdropping and waiting for the right moment. I've a new partner for my firm who will represent the Eastern branch. The name of the firm is Laddbarry & Plummer. How does that sound?"

"Dean!"

"We did manage to put one over on you, in spite of your second sight. You didn't know your husband was my partner in the Alfalfa Food Company and that he takes the East and I the West. I leave you Harriet for a bookkeeper and head clerk if she likes — but I say I must have Sally to darn my socks and boss my Chinaman as she wishes. Mother, you don't think we've slighted you — because while all this rush of commerce has been taking place you've been keeping the house. And I'll bring Sally back to you for every Christmas and let her stay until she wants to come out to me — I promise."

John was fumbling at the latch just then, staggering under a pile of wood. Densie rose to help him. The three of them piled the logs in the wicker basket, Densie talking in a rather incoherent fashion.

"And you never told me, John; nor Harriet. Dean, you might have just hinted. Sally and I are certainly intelligent enough to have understood. Well, when does this start — this new firm?"

Finished with the logs John caught her in his arms.

"It has started, brave heart," he said. "We signed partnership the day Dean landed here. It was why he came."

"Partly why I came," Dean supplemented.

"The girls will be coming home along the track. Do go meet them, Dean, there's a dear."

Obediently Dean vanished.

Left alone Densie faced her husband almost shyly, an expression of guilt on her small face and her eyes that tantalizing novelist's shade — freshly picked violets with the sun streaming in on them.

"My John, we've not lost each other — or life — or work — or God, have we?" She held out her hands.

"You saved all of them for us, Densie."

She looked at the picture of that sunny faced, dark eyed boy whose lips were mute to say what he had overheard and approved.

"Not — quite all," she faltered.

John stroked her hair with a tender lover's hand.

"If it were all, Densie, it would be too much to ask at this time of stress. Something had to be sacrificed, something always does have to be sacrificed to attain victory. I have thought about it a great deal since our boy was killed. But what right have we to cry out in protest when we have found our home, and our girls their bet-

ter selves, and you and I our love? Do you remember the story Uncle Herbert used to tell us of a Sunday afternoon — about the one shining angel who was flung out of heaven into the black pit because he looked with envy upon the brighter gold of the celestial streets than was the color of his halo?"

"I remember," she said solemnly; "I understand." But she almost whispered: "Still — you are not his mother."

Harriet burst in on them later. John was explaining in detail to Densie the possibilities of the new firm and of his new duties. He was talking in the old animated fashion that Densie had admired without profit so long ago, making computations on the corner of her housekeeping pad and proving conclusively that by the end of the next year they could have a modest car to whisk about in and that he could do most of the garden work besides — as his war contribution. The company would deal with such matters as he was familiar with — and he had been trained by the old school of honor; that this was what American food dealers needed at the present time — not profiteering. Men who were willing to think first of their nation and secondly of themselves and to wait until the day of peace before they hoarded wealth rather than investing in national needs and securities.

"I left Dean and Sally wandering sentimentally along the track," Harriet announced. "Let us hope the fast express does not try to chaperone them. Everyone was delighted with the things, and poor old Granny Leighton cried. She hadn't tasted turkey in years. And the men's tobacco caused ecstasy. Well," she asked her father, "have you fessed up?"

He nodded, holding up his hands in surrender.

"Didn't know your roof harbored conspirators, did

you?" She sat by the fire petting Captain and warming her hands. "You see, it was this way — father and I had to pay you back for all you've done. If you got the home we must get the business. Fifty-fifty," Harriet said joyously. "And I've found someone who wants to come over to help you all you wish — a good old soul, but too shy to ask for help. So you'll be able to dispense with me — for I've never done anything of special value except ask for a second helping of everything."

Harriet's eyes glowed with happiness. There was a robust color in her face and her hands did not twitch and tremble, but lay passively in her lap save when they patted Captain. She wore her frock of "spinster green," as she called it, with a feminine grace. No one else could have worn such a frock and seemed properly dressed. Harriet was well content with her station in life she had declared — her children, her new work with her father, her home. What more could one demand? As well imagine Harriet with a romance as to picture Oliver Cromwell at the opera!

"What do you think about Dean and your sister?" began John.

"I don't think — I know," Harriet answered.

Late that night Sally tapped at her mother's door.

"You know, of course," she said, laughing, having looked about to be sure Densie was alone. "You shan't have the pleasure of extorting a confession. Mummy, I'm happy; not madly, wildly happy, the sort of joy that is so terrible to have come to one — but just happy, everyday happy. And now I want to learn everything from you that I can. Dean won't wait past June."

"I am glad to have it so!"

"And you think it is right — and not too late?"

"I think it is life, Sally; and life very often does not

stop to think, it punishes and rewards us all in a moment."

"How unprepared I've been to marry — to really marry and make a home. Mummy, teach me, won't you? I want to be just like you if I can."

John had been right. Densie must not ask for more reward than was being given her, lest she too, like the shining angel of old, be dethroned because of greed.

XLVII

The garden of the Little House had been properly coaxed and prevailed upon to look its best for Sally's wedding. Harriet and her children spent the better part of their time making vines climb artistically, persuading roses to blossom as soon as possible and placing the sundial clock in the center of the old-fashioned bed of verbenas and carnation pinks — an oak pedestal with this verse cut deeply on one side:

Hours fly; flowers die;
New days; new ways
Pass by — Love stays!

John and Densie had helped with the beautification as well, though business kept John downtown until distressingly late hours — as late as Densie had once been wont to stay, and he had been bullied into resting and forbidden to sit up to read when he did come home. Sally had been occupied within doors. She would have all the time to romp outside when she went to her new home, and she chose this time, wisely, to become skilled in everything her mother could teach her, a trifle later than was best to learn — but not too late.

She made her rather simple clothes herself, sewing a woman's resurrected dreams and hopes into their fine seams or clever embroidery. She thought, as she would lay away some white dainty garment in the lavender-scented shelves, of how the other trousseau had been bought for her by a preoccupied, ambitious mother and accepted by a preoccuped, infatuated girl — showy, fash-

ionable things, turned out from unsanitary shops, very likely, poorly made, but with style and warranted only for a season's wearing.

Sally even made her wedding cake herself; she had written Dean that she would. It was as fruity a cake as wartimes would allow, and it stood in state on the dining-room serving table waiting for its final icing.

It was to be as simple a wedding as any real garden wedding could be — they twined Kenneth's picture with roses; and unbeknownst to the children, John and Densie stood beneath it to say a little prayer and cry a tear.

Sally was all pink roses and cream lace and a leghorn hat with bows under the chin, as Dean requested. She made Harriet be her only attendant, though Harriet protested — and helped her select her frock, a dainty organdie with a silver sash.

"You must wear gray silk, mummy, and comb your hair the old-fashioned way that you used to — I want to go away remembering you so — and daddy, who has grown handsome again, being entirely too well fed, will rival Dean."

No one argued with Sally — she was too happy to have listened if they had — for she turned protests into kisses and refusals into hugs, and there was an end of it.

There was little time for the wedding, business calling Dean home as soon as he could come — and bring Sally. So he slipped into town one night in time to see the wedding cake before it was iced and to have a satisfactory talk with his new business partner, and then in the early morning he married Sally — the birds singing their wedding march and the breeze sweeping through the roses as a benediction.

It was so simple and so joyous that no one thought of being pensive for an instant except Captain when he was

driven from a position of attack upon the sliecd tongue.

In a going-away dress of blue serge, her hands crowded with roses, Sally told her family good-by.

" I want to be called a bride," she insisted. " I am so happy I want everyone who sees me have to take time to stop and smile. And I want to leave the best share of my happiness behind with mummy and daddy and Harriet — and particularly mummy, for she taught me how to be happy. So I've no right to take it all away."

" I'll bring her back every Christmas," Dean promised, " to stay as long as she wishes. It isn't that you've lost Sally — but have gained a son."

He stooped and kissed Densie, his hand outstretched toward John.

" Good-by, Harriet dear, I love you," was all Sally said to her sister, but it was the first time she had ever told her those words and the first time that Harriet, splendid spinster of the modern business world, invaluable in her work and attitude toward life, took Sally in her arms and held her close.

The three, with Captain wagging his tail faster and faster, stood at the gate to wave good-by as the machine drove down the pathway.

There was silence when only the brown road showed itself. Then Harriet said, " Let's sit on the porch and plan our first visit to Sally."

At which John and Densie looked at her in gratitude.

John and Harriet took twin rockers and began a stimulating chat as to travel and business — for Harriet was his " confidential man," as John loved to call her. Densie stole inside for a moment. They hardly noticed she had left.

She went to the picture of her boy, the roses about the frame fading a trifle. She stood on tiptoe to rearrange

the wreath, and as she did so tears came to blur his loved features. But she paused before she wiped them away. It may have been an illusion — scientists could have explained it so clearly that faith and miracles would have seemed bone-dry things of some defective imagination — but the dark eyes in the picture suddenly smiled at her. They were living things telling her to be at peace, that he was still with her. They were smiling at her as they had smiled so many, many times.

Presently the eyes grew into the silent dead things of a photographer's film. But Densie had seen and would always understand and be comforted. Nor would she share her secret even with John. After all, she was his mother — and mothers are a little different from the rest of the world, and they are not, like shining angels of old, flung into black pits when they grieve for their youngest born.

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THE END







